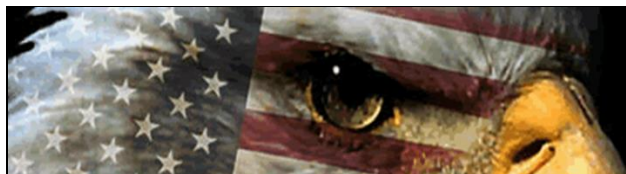



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HEADLINE	01/11 Fragility of the aviation system
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/business/faa-flight-delays-outage.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Business
GIST	Tens of thousands of flights were delayed or canceled around Christmas when frigid weather and storms made travel treacherous. But the weather was mostly fine on Wednesday morning when flights across the

country were halted because the Federal Aviation Administration's system to alert pilots to safety issues went down.

The F.A.A. said on Wednesday night that it had traced the outage to a damaged database file and that there was no evidence that it was caused by a cyberattack. The disruption was the latest example of serious problems in the aviation system and at the F.A.A., the agency responsible for safely managing all commercial air traffic that critics say has long been overworked and underfunded.

The pause on flights across the country highlighted what aviation experts say are glaring weaknesses at the agency, long considered the world's premier aviation regulator. The F.A.A. has struggled to quickly update systems and processes, many of which were put in place decades ago, to keep up with technological advancements and a sharp increase in the number of flights and passengers.

Problems with the system used to notify pilots of hazards in the air and ground began on Tuesday night, forcing officials to reboot the system early Wednesday morning. To fix the problem, the F.A.A. ordered airlines to delay all departing flights just before 7:30 a.m. That pause was lifted at about 9 a.m., but the disruption was far from over as airlines struggled to get back to normal throughout the day. Delays cascaded throughout the system and, by the afternoon, about 9,000 flights had been delayed and 1,300 had been canceled.

Just two weeks earlier, hundreds of thousands of travelers were stranded by [an operational meltdown at Southwest Airlines](#), the country's largest carrier by number of passengers. Taken together, the two episodes underscore the fragility of the nation's aviation system.

The F.A.A., in particular, has long faced criticism for failing to modernize its technological systems quickly enough and not hiring enough air traffic controllers and safety specialists. Lawmakers strongly criticized the agency's oversight of Boeing, for example, after two of the company's 737 Max planes crashed, killing 346 people in Indonesia and Ethiopia in 2018 and 2019.

A big part of the problem, aviation experts said, is that Congress has not given the F.A.A. enough money to do its many jobs properly, and the agency has sometimes been slow to make change even when it had enough resources. The agency's budget was about \$18.5 billion in 2022 — less than it was in 2004 after adjusting for inflation.

"This is an agency that has been chronically and critically underfunded, not for years, but for decades," said William J. McGee, a senior fellow for aviation at the American Economic Liberties Project, a research and advocacy group that has criticized consolidation in the airline business.

The outage will surely figure prominently in hearings and debates in Congress because the F.A.A.'s most recent authorization, passed in 2018, expires this year. That gives lawmakers an opportunity to overhaul the agency, require changes and reset its funding. Many senators and representatives have expressed anger and concern about flight delays and cancellations since air travel began to recover in 2021 after collapsing in the first year of the pandemic.

"We will be looking into what caused this outage and how redundancy plays a role in preventing future outages," Senator Maria Cantwell, Democrat of Washington and the chairwoman of the Senate Commerce Committee, said in a statement on Wednesday. "The public needs a resilient air transportation system."

The F.A.A. is also without a permanent leader, and it is not clear when that will change. Last week, President Biden renominated his choice to lead the agency, Phillip A. Washington, the chief executive of Denver International Airport. Mr. Washington was nominated last year but did not receive a Senate confirmation hearing.

He has [faced criticism](#) over his limited aviation experience and his involvement in a public corruption investigation in Los Angeles, where he previously ran the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Mr. Washington has said he did nothing wrong.

The agency has lacked a permanent leader since the end of March, when Stephen Dickson, a former Delta Air Lines executive who was [appointed by President Donald J. Trump](#), stepped down about [halfway through a five-year term](#). Since then, Billy Nolen, the F.A.A.'s top safety official, has led the agency on an interim basis.

A spokeswoman for Ms. Cantwell said her committee had not yet scheduled a hearing to consider Mr. Washington's nomination.

Pete Buttigieg, who oversees the F.A.A. as the secretary of transportation, said on Wednesday that the government was investigating what caused the outage and why the agency's systems were not more resilient.

"When there's a problem with a government system, we're going to own it, we're going to find it, and we're going to fix it," Mr. Buttigieg told reporters. "In this case, we had to make sure that there was complete confidence about the safety of flight operations, which is why there was the conservative but important step to have that pause and make sure everything was back up and running."

Experts say that the F.A.A.'s technology has grown outdated and that the agency has long lacked the resources for ambitious overhauls that would strengthen those systems.

"I've been flying airplanes for 55 years, it's been known for a long time that the F.A.A. is often underfunded," Chesley B. Sullenberger III, the pilot who safely landed a US Airways plane on the Hudson River in 2009, said in a telephone interview on Wednesday as the flight he was traveling on was delayed.

Two decades ago Congress did launch a major overhaul of the national aviation system, known as the Next Generation Air Transportation System, or NextGen. The multibillion-dollar project, which is intended to allow airlines to operate more flights and modernize some of the aging technology used by the F.A.A., has been mired in problems and taken longer than expected.

In [a 2021 report](#), the inspector general of the Transportation Department found that the benefits of the NextGen overhaul have fallen far short of early projections, but said that it still held promise. The project is supposed to help the agency handle increased air traffic and develop technology to prevent problems like Wednesday's disruption.

"The expectations for these capabilities vastly exceeded the actual deliverables," said Robert Mann, an airline industry expert and president of the aviation consultancy R.W. Mann and Company.

In recent years, the F.A.A. has fallen short in other areas, including not having enough air traffic controllers in some parts of the country at times. The airline industry and a union that represents controllers have said that staffing shortages have led to flight delays and cancellations.

Airline executives and union leaders say the air traffic control center in Jacksonville, Fla., in particular has been overwhelmed by flights. That issue has been compounded by bad weather, commercial space launches and other problems, Rich Santa, the president of the union, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, said in a speech last summer.

"If you fly on the East Coast, if you come close to Florida, you are affected by this facility," he said.

The agency launched a broad air traffic controller recruiting campaign last year, but the effort is unlikely to quickly resolve any staffing problems because hiring and training controllers can take months — and getting new hires to the right places can take even longer.

The agency also faced widespread criticism for failing to adequately ensure the safety of Boeing's 737 Max jet after the two crashes. The F.A.A. had outsourced oversight to Boeing itself through a program

	<p>where some regulatory work was delegated to company employees. That practice was allowed under federal law partly because the agency didn't have the resources to do the work on its own.</p> <p>Representative Nancy Mace, Republican of South Carolina, said the outage on Wednesday was particularly frustrating because it happened so soon after Southwest Airlines' meltdown during the holidays.</p> <p>Ms. Mace said Southwest and federal agencies should face the same tough scrutiny and that she intended to ask the F.A.A. questions about its shortcomings and how it planned to address them.</p> <p>"The F.A.A. is putting safety first, which is important," Ms. Mace said. "But also, at the same time, Americans should know they can take a flight on any random week of the year and know that they'll get to their destination safely and securely."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/12 SKorea: nuclear weapons policy option
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/12/world/asia/south-korea-nuclear-weapons.html
GIST	<p>SEOUL — President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea said for the first time on Wednesday that if North Korea's nuclear threat grows, South Korea would consider building nuclear weapons of its own or ask the United States to redeploy them on the Korean Peninsula.</p> <p>Speaking during a joint policy briefing by his defense and foreign ministries on Wednesday, Mr. Yoon was quick to add that building nuclear weapons was not yet an official policy. He stressed that South Korea would for now deal with North Korea's nuclear threat by strengthening its alliance with the United States.</p> <p>Such a policy includes finding ways to increase the reliability of Washington's commitment to protect its ally with all of its defense capabilities, including nuclear weapons.</p> <p>Mr. Yoon's comments marked the first time since the United States withdrew all of its nuclear weapons from the South in 1991 that a South Korean president officially mentioned arming the country with nuclear weapons. Washington removed its nuclear weapons from South Korea as part of its global nuclear arms reduction efforts.</p> <p>"It's possible that the problem gets worse and our country will introduce tactical nuclear weapons or build them on our own," said Mr. Yoon, according to a transcript of his comments released by his office. "If that's the case, we can have our own nuclear weapons pretty quickly, given our scientific and technological capabilities."</p> <p>South Korea is a signatory of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, or NPT, which bans the country from seeking nuclear weapons. It also signed a joint declaration with North Korea in 1991 in which both Koreas agreed not to "test, manufacture, produce, receive, possess, store, deploy or use nuclear weapons."</p> <p>But North Korea has reneged on the agreement by conducting six nuclear tests since 2006. Years of negotiations have failed to remove a single nuclear warhead in the North. (American and South Korean officials say that North Korea could conduct another nuclear test, its seventh, at any moment.)</p> <p>As North Korea vowed to expand its nuclear arsenal and threatened to use it against the South in recent months, voices have grown in South Korea — among analysts and within Mr. Yoon's conservative ruling People Power Party — calling for Seoul to reconsider a nuclear option.</p> <p>Mr. Yoon's comments this week were likely to fuel such discussions. Opinion surveys in recent years have shown that a majority of South Koreans supported the United States redeploying nuclear weapons to the South or the country's building an arsenal of its own.</p>

Policymakers in Seoul have disavowed the option for decades, arguing that the so-called nuclear-umbrella protection from the United States would keep the country safe from North Korea.

“President Yoon’s comment could turn out to be a watershed moment in the history of South Korea’s national security,” said Cheon Seong-whun, a former head of the Korea Institute for National Unification, a government-funded research think tank in Seoul. “It could shift its paradigm in how to deal with the North Korean nuclear threat.”

Calls for nuclear weapons have bubbled up in South Korea over the decades, but they have never gained traction beyond the occasional analysts and right-wing politicians.

Under its former military dictator Park Chung-hee, South Korea embarked on a covert nuclear weapons program in the 1970s, when the United States began reducing its military presence in the South, making its people feel vulnerable to North Korean attacks. Washington forced him to abandon the program, promising to keep the ally under its nuclear umbrella.

Washington still keeps 28,500 American troops in South Korea as the symbol of the alliance. But in recent months, North Korea has continued testing missiles, some of which were designed to deliver nuclear warheads to the South. Many South Koreans have questioned whether the United States would stop North Korea from attacking their country, especially at the risk of leaving American cities and military bases in the Asia-Pacific region more vulnerable to a nuclear attack. Washington’s repeated promise to protect its ally — with its own nuclear weapons, if necessary — has not dissipated such fear.

In its 2022 Nuclear Posture Review, a document that outlines Washington’s nuclear policy for the next five to 10 years, the Pentagon itself noted the “deterrence dilemmas” that the North posed to the United States. “A crisis or conflict on the Korean Peninsula could involve a number of nuclear-armed actors, raising the risk of broader conflict,” it said.

“If South Korea possesses nuclear weapons, the United States will not need to ask whether it should use its own nuclear weapons to defend its ally, and the alliance will never be put to a test,” said Cheong Seong-chang, a senior analyst at the Sejong Institute in South Korea. “If South Korea owns nuclear weapons, the U.S. will actually become safer.”

By declaring an intention to arm itself with nuclear weapons, South Korea could force North Korea to rethink its own nuclear weapons program and possibly prompt China to put pressure on Pyongyang to roll back its program, Mr. Cheong said. China has long feared a regional nuclear arms race in East Asia.

South Korea would need to quit the NPT to build its own arsenal. Analysts said that quitting the NPT would be too risky for the South because it could trigger international sanctions.

Some lawmakers affiliated with Mr. Yoon’s party and analysts like Mr. Cheon want the United States to reintroduce American nuclear weapons to the South and forge a nuclear-sharing agreement with Seoul, similar to the one in which NATO aircraft would be allowed to carry American nuclear weapons in wartime.

The American Embassy had no immediate comment on Mr. Yoon’s statement. Washington’s official policy is to make the Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons, fearing that if Seoul were to build nuclear weapons, it could trigger a regional arms race and eliminate any hope of ridding North Korea of its nuclear weapons.

Mr. Yoon himself reiterated on Thursday that his country remained committed to the NPT, at least for now. He said on Wednesday — and his Defense Ministry reiterated on Thursday — that the more “realistic means” of countering the North Korean threat would be through joint deterrence with the United States.

	<p>His government said the allies will introduce tabletop exercises from next month to test their combined capabilities to deal with a North Korean nuclear attack and to help reassure Washington's commitment to its ally. Mr. Yoon also said his military will boost its own "massive punishment and retaliation" program, arming itself with more powerful missiles and other conventional weapons to threaten the North's leadership.</p> <p>Tensions have been on the rise in Korea in recent weeks, as Mr. Yoon's government responded to the North's provocations with its own escalatory steps, like dispatching fighter jets in response to drones from the North.</p> <p>"We must squash the North's desire to provoke," he said on Wednesday.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/12 US escalates fight China police outposts
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/12/world/europe/china-outpost-new-york.html
GIST	<p>The nondescript, six-story office building on a busy street in New York's Chinatown lists several mundane businesses on its lobby directory, including an engineering company, an acupuncturist and an accounting firm.</p> <p>A more remarkable enterprise, on the third floor, is unlisted: a Chinese outpost suspected of conducting police operations without jurisdiction or diplomatic approval — one of more than 100 such outfits around the world that are unnerving diplomats and intelligence agents.</p> <p>F.B.I. counterintelligence agents searched the building last fall as part of a criminal investigation being conducted with the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn, according to people with knowledge of the inquiry. The search represents an escalation in a global dispute over China's efforts to police its diaspora far beyond its borders. Irish, Canadian and Dutch officials have called for China to shut down police operations in their countries. The F.B.I. raid is the first known example of the authorities seizing materials from one of the outposts.</p> <p>Those who discussed the F.B.I. search did so on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter. The Chinese Embassy in Washington on Wednesday played down the role of the outposts, saying they are staffed by volunteers who help Chinese nationals perform routine tasks like renewing their driver's licenses back home.</p> <p>But Chinese state news media reports reviewed by The New York Times cite police and local Chinese officials by name describing the operations very differently. They tout the effectiveness of the offices, which are frequently called overseas police service centers. Some reports describe the Chinese outposts "collecting intelligence" and solving crimes abroad without collaborating with local officials. The public statements leave it murky who exactly is running the offices. Sometimes they are referred to as volunteers; other times as staff members or, in at least one case, the director.</p> <p>Some of those online articles have been deleted recently as Western officials and human rights groups have called attention to the police offices.</p> <p>Western officials see the outposts as part of Beijing's larger drive to keep tabs on Chinese nationals abroad, including dissidents. The most notorious such effort is known as Operation Fox Hunt, in which Chinese officials hunt down fugitives abroad and pressure them to return home.</p> <p>At least four Chinese localities — Fuzhou, Qingtian, Nantong and Wenzhou — have set up dozens of police outposts, according to state media accounts and public statements published in China. They identify sites in Japan, Italy, France, Britain, Germany, Hungary, the Czech Republic and other nations.</p> <p>"It's extremely worrying from the human rights perspective. We're essentially allowing the Chinese diaspora to be controlled by the P.R.C. rather than subject to our national laws," said Igor Merheim-Eyre,</p>

an adviser to a Slovakian member of the European Parliament, using the acronym for the People's Republic of China. "That obviously has a huge impact — not only for our relations with the Chinese diaspora across Europe, but also has huge implications for national sovereignty."

The New York outpost, which was set up by the city of Fuzhou, is based in the offices of a Chinese community organization, the America Changle Association NY, according to the state-run China Youth Daily, which last year published a document listing various police outposts. Changle is a district in the city of Fuzhou. The article has since been deleted. Other addresses of Chinese police outposts match locations of private businesses, including Chinese restaurants and commercial associations. The Chinese embassy in Washington described the spaces as "provided by local overseas Chinese communities who would like to be helpful."

America Changle is headed by Lu Jianshun, known as Jimmy Lu, a donor to Mayor Eric Adams of New York. It is unclear whether he is a focus of the F.B.I.'s investigation. A spokesman for Mr. Adams said the mayor does not know him.

Mr. Lu, asked during a brief phone conversation about the F.B.I. search, said he would call back but did not. He did not respond to telephone and text messages seeking comment. Spokesmen for the F.B.I. and the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn declined to comment, but the F.B.I. director, Christopher Wray, told lawmakers in November that he was aware of and concerned by the outposts, which he called police stations.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington said the sites are not police stations. "They are not police personnel from China," said the embassy spokesperson, Liu Pengyu. "There is no need to make people nervous about this."

It is not automatically inappropriate for police officers to work overseas. The F.B.I., for example, posts agents abroad. But they typically declare themselves to the foreign government and work out of American embassies. If they perform law enforcement duties, it is with the permission of the local authorities. China has made similar arrangements for joint patrols in places like Italy, a popular destination for Chinese tourists.

That makes the off-the-books operations all the more curious.

China's Foreign Ministry has said little in response to the criticism, but back in China, police departments have trumpeted their reach and information-gathering powers both in official statements and in the state news media.

One article in a newspaper associated with the propaganda department of China's Qingtian County describes a Chinese woman who said she had money stolen in Budapest. Instead of calling the local authorities, she sought help from the Chinese police outpost there. The people in charge of the police center, the article said, used surveillance footage from a convenience store to identify the thief, a Romanian, and recovered the money through "negotiation and education."

The state-run China News Service said Qingtian's overseas police centers gathered information on public opinion and the sentiment of Chinese people living abroad.

And an article posted by a Communist Party body in Jiangsu province said that Nantong City Overseas Police Linkage Service Centers had helped capture and persuade more than 80 criminal suspects to return to China since February 2016. The human rights group Safeguard Defenders said in a report late last year that the police stations carried out similar operations in Serbia, Spain and France.

It is not clear what the F.B.I. was investigating during its search, but it comes amid a broader Justice Department effort to rein in Fox Hunt. In October, prosecutors in Brooklyn — the same office that searched the New York office — charged seven Chinese nationals with harassing a U.S. resident and his son, pressuring the man to return to China to face criminal charges.

“It’s outrageous that China thinks it can come to our shores, conduct illegal operations and bend people here in the United States to their will,” Mr. Wray said in 2020, after the authorities charged eight others with being part of Fox Hunt.

The Chinese government has also surveilled and pressured ethnic minorities abroad, including Uyghurs and Tibetans, as well as their families. Human rights groups and government officials fear that the outposts could be bases for these kinds of operations.

Current and former law enforcement officials in New York say that the Chinatown outpost, like others elsewhere in the United States, dates to the middle of the last decade. Police officials in at least one Chinese province tried then to arrange for their officers to train with the New York Police Department and other departments in cities that are home to large Chinese communities, the law enforcement officials said.

The Chinese officials wanted the N.Y.P.D. to sign a memorandum of understanding to outline the training program and make it official. But senior commanders and New York F.B.I. officials had serious concerns. They feared that the training program could legitimize the presence of Chinese officers and potentially make the N.Y.P.D. an unwitting partner in a campaign of surveillance and harassment, the officials said.

“The Chinese government wants to have more influence and to extend their transnational policing,” said Chen Yen-ting, a Taiwan-based researcher who worked on the Safeguard Defenders report. “It’s a long-arm power to show their own citizens inside China that their government is so strong. We have the power to reach globally, and even if you go out, you’re still under our control.”

The Chinese cities appear to be taking steps to conceal their efforts. Márton Tompos, a Hungarian lawmaker, said he visited a Chinese police center in Budapest last year. “There were three signs saying Qingtian Police Overseas Service Station,” he said in an interview. After he spoke about the visit, he said, the signs were removed.

Not everyone is convinced that the outposts present a major threat. Jeremy Daum, a scholar at the Paul Tsai China Center at Yale Law School, said that though government harassment of Chinese nationals is a serious problem, for the most part these personnel appear focused on arranging administrative tasks by providing video links between Chinese people abroad and police departments back in China.

In theory, a person could carry out the same video chat process, he said, using a smartphone.

“The processing and activity seems to be happening in China,” Mr. Daum said, referring to examples cited in the Safeguard Defenders report.

Chinese dissidents in Europe see things differently. “Those are things you can get done at the embassy,” said Lin Shengliang, a Chinese dissident in the Netherlands. He said people fear the police are keeping tabs on them.

“I am extremely anxious about them,” he said by phone. “There are no channels to report this, and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

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HEADLINE	01/11 Britain, Japan military deployment pact
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/11/Japan-defense-agreement/7331673438867/
GIST	Jan. 11 (UPI) -- The prime ministers of Britain and Japan signed a defense agreement in London on Wednesday marking another sign of the Asian country strengthening its military ties since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida signed the agreement that will allow Britain and Japan to deploy forces in one another's countries, extending Britain's reach into the Indo-Pacific region.

"A shared outlook on the world. A shared understanding of the challenges we face. A shared ambition to use our place in the world for good," Sunak said in a statement after signing the agreement. "It's great to see U.K. and Japan working as close as ever."

Under the agreement, Britain will become the first European country to have a Reciprocal Access Agreement since 1902, as Sunak said it is important for democratic societies to "stand shoulder to shoulder as we navigate the unprecedented global challenges of our time."

"This Reciprocal Access Agreement is hugely significant for both our nations -- it cements our commitment to the Indo-Pacific and underlines our joint efforts to bolster economic security, accelerate our defense cooperation and drive innovation that creates highly skilled jobs," Sunak said in a statement.

The agreement also comes after Britain, Japan and Italy launched the Global Combat Air Program and new digital partnership between Britain and Japan.

The combat program to develop a next-generation jet fighter by 2035.

"In the past 12 months, we have written the next chapter of the relationship between the U.K. and Japan -- accelerating, building and deepening our ties," Sunak said.

"We have so much in common: a shared outlook on the world, a shared understanding of the threats and challenges we face, and a shared ambition to use our place in the world for global good, ensuring our countries prosper for generations to come."

Kishida likewise described the agreement as "extremely significant," and one he hopes "will promote security and defense cooperation between Japan and the United Kingdom and that progress will be made toward the realization of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific.'"

On Tuesday, Japan and Italy agreed to launch bilateral security talks to boost defense cooperation, including engaging the two countries' foreign and defense officials and an in-person meeting Kishida and Italian leader Giorgia Meloni held in Rome.

Before leaving Japan for his trip to Europe and the United States, Kishida said he planned to express that Japan understands the security risks globally have changed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The global economy is also facing the possibility of downside risk," Kishida said in comments this week. "Upon confirming that with the other leaders, I will lay out Japan's way of thinking as the G7 presidency and reaffirm our cooperation going forward."

In December, Japan enshrined military changes in three security documents, including a controversial counterstrike capability, which allowed it to shed numerous limitations it placed on itself post World War II.

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HEADLINE	01/12 WHO warns of holiday Covid surge
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinese-fret-over-infecting-elderly-holidays-prompt-covid-warnings-2023-01-12/
GIST	BEIJING, Jan 12 (Reuters) - People in China worried on Thursday about spreading COVID-19 to aged relatives as they planned returns to their home towns for holidays that the World Health Organization warns could inflame a raging outbreak.

The Lunar New Year holiday, which officially starts on Jan. 21, comes after China last month abandoned a strict anti-virus regime of mass lockdowns that prompted widespread frustration and boiled over into historic protests.

That abrupt U-turn unleashed COVID on a population of 1.4 billion which lacks natural immunity, having been shielded from the virus since it first erupted in late 2019, and includes many elderly who are not fully vaccinated.

The outbreak spreading from China's mega-cities to rural areas with weaker medical resources is overwhelming some hospitals and crematoriums.

With scant official data from China, the WHO on Wednesday said it would be challenging to manage the virus over a holiday period considered the world's largest annual migration of people.

Other warnings from top Chinese health experts for people to avoid aged relatives during the holidays shot to the most-read item on China's Twitter-like Weibo on Thursday.

"This is a very pertinent suggestion, return to the home town ... or put the health of the elderly first," wrote one user. Another user said they did not dare visit their grandmother and would leave gifts for her on the doorstep.

"This is almost the New Year and I'm afraid that she will be lonely," the user wrote.

More than two billion trips are expected across China over the broader Lunar New Year period, which started on Jan. 7 and runs for 40 days, according to the transport ministry. That is double last year's trips and 70% of those seen in 2019 before the pandemic emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan.

"I will stay at home and avoid going to very crowded places," said Chen, a 27-year-old documentary filmmaker in Beijing who plans to visit her home town in the eastern province of Zhejiang.

Chen said she would disinfect her hands before meeting elderly relatives, such as her grandmother, who has managed to avoid infection.

LACK OF DATA CRITICISED

The WHO and foreign governments have criticised China for not being forthright about the scale and severity of its outbreak, which has led several countries to impose restrictions on Chinese travellers.

China has been reporting five or fewer deaths a day over the past month, numbers that are inconsistent with the long queues seen at funeral homes. The country did not report COVID deaths data on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Liang Wannian, the head of a COVID expert panel under the national health authority, told reporters that deaths could only be accurately counted after the pandemic was over.

Although international health experts have predicted at least a million COVID-related deaths this year, China has reported just over 5,000 since the pandemic began, a fraction of what other countries have reported as they removed restrictions.

Looking beyond the death toll, investors are betting that China's reopening will reinvigorate a \$17 trillion economy suffering its lowest growth in nearly half a century.

That has lifted Asian stocks to a seven-month peak, strengthened China's yuan currency against the U.S. dollar and bolstered global oil prices on hopes of fresh demand from the world's top importer.

China's growth is likely to rebound to 4.9% in 2023, according to a Reuters poll of economists released on Thursday. GDP likely grew just 2.8% in 2022 as lockdowns weighed on activity and confidence, according to the poll, braking sharply from 8.4% growth in 2021.

TRAVEL CHALLENGES

After three years of isolation from the outside world, China on Sunday dropped quarantine mandates for inbound visitors in a move expected to eventually also stimulate outbound travel.

But concerns about China's outbreak has prompted more than a dozen countries to demand negative COVID test results from people arriving from China.

Among them, South Korea and Japan have also limited flights and require tests on arrival, with passengers showing up as positive being sent to quarantine.

In a deepening spat between the regional rivals, China has in turn stopped issuing short-term visas and suspended transit visa exemptions for South Korean and Japanese nationals.

Despite Beijing's lifting of travel curbs, outbound flight bookings from China were at only 15% of pre-pandemic levels in the week after the country announced it would reopen its borders, travel data firm ForwardKeys said on Thursday.

Low airline capacity, high air fares, new pre-flight COVID-19 testing requirements by many countries and a backlog of passport and visa applications pose challenges as the industry looks to recovery, ForwardKeys Vice President Insights Olivier Ponti said in a statement.

Hong Kong Airlines on Thursday said it does not expect to return to capacity until mid-2024.

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HEADLINE	01/12 Kherson: Russia forces behind torture
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/scale-alleged-torture-detentions-by-russian-forces-kherson-emerges-2023-01-12/
GIST	<p>KHERSON, Ukraine, Jan 12 (Reuters) - Oksana Minenko, a 44-year-old accountant who lives in the Ukrainian city of Kherson, said she was repeatedly detained and tortured by occupying Russian forces.</p> <p>Her husband, a Ukrainian soldier, died defending Kherson's Antonivskyi bridge on the first day of full-scale war, she said. During several interrogations in the spring, Russian forces submerged her hands in boiling water, pulled out her fingernails and beat her in the face with rifle butts so badly she needed plastic surgery, according to Minenko.</p> <p>"One pain grew into another," said Minenko, speaking while at an improvised humanitarian aid centre in early December with scarring visible around her eyes from what she said was an operation to repair the damage. "I was a living corpse."</p> <p>The methods of the alleged physical torture administered by occupying Russian forces have included electric shocks to genitals and other parts of the body, beatings and various forms of suffocation, according to interviews with more than a dozen alleged victims, members of Ukrainian law enforcement and international prosecutors assisting Ukraine.</p> <p>Prisoners were also held in overcrowded cells without sanitation or sufficient food or water for periods of up to two months, some of the people said.</p> <p>Reuters wasn't able to independently corroborate individual accounts shared by Minenko and other Kherson residents but they fit with what Ukrainian authorities and international human rights specialists have said about conditions and treatment during detention, including detainees being blindfolded and</p>

bound, subject to beatings and electric shocks and injuries, including severe bruising and broken bones, forced nudity and other forms of sexual violence.

“This was done systematically, exhaustingly” to obtain information about the Ukrainian military and suspected collaborators or to punish those critical of the Russian occupation, according to Andriy Kovalenko, the Kherson region’s chief war crimes prosecutor.

The Kremlin and Russia’s defence ministry didn’t respond to Reuters’ questions, including about alleged torture and unlawful detentions. Moscow, which has said it is conducting a “special military operation” in Ukraine, has denied committing war crimes or targeting civilians.

According to the most comprehensive figures to date on the scale of alleged torture and detentions, shared exclusively with Reuters by Ukraine’s top war crimes prosecutor, the country’s authorities have opened pre-trial investigations involving more than a thousand people in the Kherson region who were allegedly abducted and illegally detained by Russian forces during their months-long occupation.

The scale of alleged crimes in the Kherson region now emerging appears to be much greater than around the capital of Kyiv, say members of Ukrainian law enforcement, which they attribute to the fact that it was occupied for so much longer.

Ukraine’s top war crimes prosecutor, Yuriy Belousov, said authorities have identified ten sites in the Kherson region used by Russian forces for unlawful detentions. Around 200 people who were allegedly tortured or physically assaulted while held at those sites and about another 400 people were illegally held there, he said. Ukrainian authorities say they expect the figures to grow as the investigation continues following Russia’s mid-November withdrawal from Kherson city, the only regional Ukrainian capital it captured during its nearly year-long war against its Western neighbour.

Nationwide, authorities have opened pre-trial investigations into alleged unlawful detentions of more than 13,200 people, Belousov said. They have launched 1,900 probes into allegations of ill-treatment and illegal detention, he said.

Russia has accused Ukraine of carrying out war crimes and the West of ignoring them, including alleging that Ukrainian soldiers had executed Russian prisoners of war. The United Nations in November said it had found evidence that both sides had tortured prisoners of war, with a U.N. official saying Russian abuse was “fairly systematic.” Kyiv has previously said it would investigate any alleged abuses by its armed forces.

Minenko believes her alleged tormentors targeted her because her husband had been a soldier. During his burial a week after his death, Russian forces turned up at the cemetery and made Minenko kneel next to his grave, firing their automatic weapons in mock execution, she said.

According to Minenko, on three occasions in March and April men in Russian military uniforms with their faces covered by balaclavas came to her home at night, interrogated her and took her into detention. On one occasion, the men forced her to undress and then beat her while her hands were tied to the chair and her head was covered.

“When you have a bag on your head and you’re being beaten, there is such a vacuum, you cannot breathe, you cannot do anything, you cannot defend yourself,” Minenko said.

‘WIDESPREAD’ CRIMES

Moscow’s February invasion of Ukraine plunged Europe into its biggest land war since World War Two. Having begun its occupation of Kherson city in March, Russia withdrew its forces in November saying it was futile to waste more Russian blood there.

Of more than 50,000 reports of war crimes that have been registered with Ukrainian authorities, Belousov said more than 7,700 have come from the Kherson region. More than 540 civilians remain missing from

the region, he added. Some people have been taken to Russian-held territory in apparent forced deportations, including children, according to Kovalenko, the regional prosecutor.

Belousov said authorities have found more than 80 bodies, the majority of whom were civilians, with more than 50 of those people having died as a result of gunshot wounds or artillery shelling. Belousov added that hundreds of bodies of civilians had been found in other areas that Russian forces had withdrawn from. That includes more than 800 civilians in the Kharkiv region, where investigators have had longer to probe after Ukraine retook a vast tract of territory in September.

Ukrainian authorities have also identified 25 locations in the Kharkiv region they described as “torture camps,” according to a Jan. 2 Facebook post by Kharkiv’s regional police chief, Volodymyr Tymoshko.

Some of the thousands of alleged war crimes committed by Russian forces could be escalated to overseas tribunals if they are deemed sufficiently serious. The Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC) has opened an investigation into alleged war crimes in Ukraine.

The numbers that are emerging on the scale of alleged detentions and torture, “point to widespread and grave criminality in Russian-occupied territory,” said British lawyer Nigel Povoas, lead prosecutor with a Western-backed team of legal specialists assisting Kyiv’s efforts to prosecute war crimes.

Povoas said there appears to have been a pattern to inflict terror and suffering across Ukraine, which reinforces “the impression of a wider, criminal policy, emanating from the leadership” to target the country’s civilian population.

ALLEGED BEATINGS, ELECTRIC SHOCKS

One 35-year-old man from Kherson city said that during a five-day detention in August, Russian forces beat him, made him undress and administered electric shocks to his genitals and ears. When the current hits “it’s like a ball flying into your head and you pass out,” said the man, who asked to be identified only by his first name Andriy due to fear of reprisals.

He said his captors interrogated him about Ukraine’s military efforts, including the storage of weapons and explosives, because they suspected him of having links to the resistance movement. Andriy told Reuters he knew people who served in the Ukrainian military and territorial defence forces but wasn’t a member himself.

One of the largest detention facilities in the region was an office building in Kherson city, according to Ukrainian authorities. They say more than 30 people are known to have been held in just one of the rooms in the warren-like basement that was used for detention and torture during the Russian occupation. An investigation to establish the total number of people held is ongoing, authorities said.

During a December visit to the building’s basement, the smell of human excrement filled the air, bricked-up windows blocked the light and lying visible were signs of what Ukrainian authorities say were tools of torture by Russian forces such as metal pipes, plastic ties for ligatures and a wire hanging from the ceiling allegedly used to administer electric shocks. Scratched on the wall were notches, which authorities said were made by detainees possibly to count the number of days held, as well as messages. One read: “For Her I Live.”

Another location in the city where people were allegedly interrogated and tortured was a police building that locals have referred to as “the hole,” according to Ukrainian authorities and more than half a dozen Kherson residents Reuters spoke to.

Liudmyla Shumkova, 47, said she and her 53-year old sister were held captive at the site, on No. 3 Energy Workers’ Street, for most of the more than fifty days they spent in detention this summer. She said the Russians asked them about her sister’s son because they believed he was involved in the resistance movement.

Shumkova, who works as a lawyer in the health sector, said about half a dozen people packed into a cell with just a small window for light and as little food as one meal a day. She said she wasn't physically tortured but fellow detainees were, including a female police officer she shared a cell with. Men received particularly harsh torture, she said. "They screamed, it was constant, every day. It could last for 2 or 3 hours."

INVESTIGATION CONTINUES

Investigators continue to try to identify those responsible for the alleged war crimes, including the possible role of senior military leadership. When asked whether authorities had initiated criminal proceedings against alleged perpetrators of torture, Belousov, the war crimes chief, said more than 70 people had been identified as suspects and 30 people had been indicted.

Belousov, who didn't name the individuals, said most of the suspects are lower-ranking military officials but some are "senior officers, in particular colonels and lieutenant colonels" as well as senior figures in pro-Russian Luhansk and Donetsk military-civilian administrations. Representatives of the pro-Russian Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic didn't respond to questions about whether their forces were involved in unlawful detentions or torture.

The Kremlin and Russian defence ministry didn't respond to questions about alleged perpetrators.

On a cold December day in the village of Bilozerka in the Kherson region, war crimes investigators pored over a courthouse Ukrainian authorities say was used by Russian forces to detain and torture individuals as well as a nearby school that was turned into a barracks for around 300 Russian soldiers. The now deserted school building, where walls were painted with the "Z" symbol that has become an emblem of support for Russia in the war, was littered with debris including gas masks and medical kits, Russian literature and bullets fired into a brick wall.

At the courthouse, a small team of investigators dusted for fingerprints and collected DNA samples. In an adjacent garage, they had placed numbered yellow markers to identify evidence. A desk chair lay upturned and nearby lay plastic ties littered as well as a gas mask attached to a tube and pouch for liquid, which two prosecutors said resembles improvised torture devices allegedly used by occupying Russians to create a sensation of drowning.

The Kremlin and Russian defence ministry didn't respond to questions about methods of alleged torture.

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HEADLINE	01/11 FAA NOTAM gender-neutral name change
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/faa-biden-administration/2023/01/11/id/1104049/
GIST	<p>The government computer system that broke down Wednesday, causing the grounding of thousands of flights and upending travel plans for millions of passengers, might be antiquated, but its name was changed more than a year ago to cater to woke interests.</p> <p>The system that broke down, called NOTAM, used to stand for "Notice to Airmen," but on Dec. 2, 2021, the Federal Aviation Administration issued an order that included changing the name to "Notice to Missions," "which is inclusive of all aviators and missions," according to the directive. It also was changed to include such unmanned aircraft as weather balloons and drones.</p> <p>The Federal Women's Program, created in 1967 by President Lyndon B. Johnson to ensure women receive equal opportunity in every area of federal service, claimed one of its program objectives was a "recommendation for FAA policy to include that in general, all references should be nongender-specific (e.g., uncrewed as opposed to manned or unmanned). Replacement of language from airman and airmen to neutral terms like pilot, aircrew, or flight personnel. For example, Notice to Airmen is now to Notice to Air Missions."</p> <p>Newsmax reached out to the FAA for comment.</p>

	<p>In light of the cancelation fiasco, the American Accountability Foundation tweeted Wednesday: "With the FAA groundstop this morning, another reminder that Biden Admin wokeness knows no bounds. Dec. 2021 @FAANews put out a 176-page regulation changing 'Notice to Airmen' to 'Notice to Air Missions.'"</p> <p>Responding to that tweet, U.S. Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz., tweeted: "Instead of focusing on real transportation issues, @SecretaryPete and his minions have focused on woke garbage like below. A regulation like this does not advance the FAA's mission 'to provide the safest, most efficient aerospace system in the world.'"</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Poland to send 14 Leopard tanks to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-government-andrzej-duda-europe-business-77ce9801328b98b77f72b0cb6d989717
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Poland has decided to send a company of Leopard tanks to help neighboring Ukraine in the war with invading Russia, President Andrzej Duda said Wednesday.</p> <p>But Duda, on a visit to Lviv, said that the move would be possible only as an element in a larger international coalition of tank aid to Kyiv.</p> <p>Poland’s leaders have been indicating that they were in talks with other countries over a potential international coalition that would send the German-made Leopard tanks to Ukraine. They haven’t named the countries.</p> <p>Within this potential international coalition, “we have taken the decision to contribute a first package of tanks, a company of Leopard tanks, which, I hope, together with other companies of Leopard and other tanks that will be offered by other countries will be able to strengthen Ukraine’s defense,” Duda told a news conference in Lviv.</p> <p>A company consists of 14 tanks.</p> <p>“Lithuania and Poland have confirmed their determination to continue providing military, political, diplomatic, economic and humanitarian support to Ukraine,” Nausėda said.</p> <p>“The war in Ukraine is our war — the war of the free world against a dictator. We will stand with Ukraine until victory,” he said.</p> <p>In Britain, another staunch ally of Ukraine, the spokesman for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said that “battle tanks could provide a game-changing capability to the Ukrainians.”</p> <p>Spokesman Max Blain said that Sunak has instructed Defense Secretary Ben Wallace to work with allies on what vehicles were best to send. He said no final decision has been made. The U.K has been considering whether to send Challenger 2 battle tanks to Ukraine, which has been battling Russia’s full-scale invasion since Feb. 24.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 SEA is a shelter source for homeless
SOURCE	https://www.kuow.org/stories/for-some-without-a-home-the-airport-is-a-source-of-shelter
GIST	<p>The homelessness crisis in Seattle is often highly visible, with many people living in camps, tents, and RVs. But there are those who are trying to stay invisible, often hiding in the jam of travel at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.</p> <p>The Port of Seattle says it's trying to direct these people into temporary shelter but there are few places in the area for people to go.</p>

A cold wind howls down the tunnel that leads from the light rail station to the airport. That's where Miguel Mendoza is walking as travelers rush by to catch a flight. On a chilly night like this one, Mendoza said he does what he can to stay warm.

"Sometimes I spend nights walking, all night buses," Mendoza said with a backpack slung over one shoulder. "You know, just traveling on buses, trains."

On that night, he took light rail to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport where he planned to find a bench and get some sleep. Mendoza said he has slept at the airport a few times before.

"Not often, no, because the police...they see you're sleeping or whatever, they kick you out," he said.

Police and having to sleep in a chair are two reasons why Mendoza doesn't really like to come to the airport — but he has few other options.

At one point, he was staying at a shelter in Seattle. That was a temporary severe weather shelter that only opened during the recent cold snap.

"They opened a few shelters for the bad weather, like it was snowing, but it was for a week, less than a week, and then it is very hard to get a shelter, very hard," Mendoza said.

A year ago, Mendoza was working as a chef and living at a motel close to the airport. But then he got really sick and lost his job, he said. At the airport, he still had a cough and wasn't sure if it was a cold, the flu, or Covid.

The night Mendoza spoke to KUOW, he found a bench in baggage claim, away from the luggage carousels and near a wall. He sat in one chair and kept a close eye on his backpack next to him.

Asked if he feels unsafe at the airport, Mendoza said: "Yes, well I mean, like, you don't know what's going to happen. If I had money, I'd go to a motel and feel safe there. But this is like public."

One reason Mendoza and others seek shelter at the airport is that it's easy to blend in. On this night, the baggage claim area was packed with exhausted looking people carrying lots of bags. Most were travelers waiting on delayed flights. But some were people like De Chung, who sleeps at the airport nearly every night.

"I don't know where to go," Chung said. "Outside is too cold and there's rain."

He tries to keep a low profile and not get thrown out. He said he gets along with airport security because they don't ask him to leave but Port of Seattle police do.

Mendoza and Chung are among dozens of homeless people who come to the airport to get out of the cold.

The exact figure isn't clear, as the Port says it does not, "have the ability to keep accurate statistics on the number of people experiencing homelessness." A spokesperson said they hope to have more data in the coming months.

An airport may feel like a public space but Port of Seattle police officer Michelle Bregel said in March that unsheltered people are coming in and, "not really realizing that they're trespassing on private property."

Last year, the Port brought Bregel on as a full-time crisis coordinator. In March, she said her job was to "help [unsheltered people] connect to family, give them resources on finding shelters, get them connected to behavioral health providers, or the local hospital if necessary."

Nearly everyone who was at the airport the same night as Chung and Mendoza said they hadn't been referred to a shelter before, only led to the door by Port police.

Bregel said the Port is concerned about the safety of travelers. This past December, TSA said an unhoused person at SeaTac got past a security checkpoint and into an employee area. The incident caused delays during peak holiday travel.

Another person finding shelter that night was Ben Hall, who was smoking a cigarette outside the international terminal. Hall said there's not much to do when sleeping overnight at the airport.

"It's boring and it's hard to lay down and close your eyes," he said while watching cars drive away.

Hall added that he doesn't particularly have a favorite spot to sleep.

"Wherever," he said. "Hide in a hole somewhere."

Throughout the night, Hall moved around the departure and arrival areas quite a bit. First sleeping in a chair, then on the floor behind a vending machine.

He said he has run into Bregel a few times.

"There's one lady here who's a cop, who's always trying to hook me up and help me out and I'm gonna let her," Hall said, putting out his cigarette. "I'm gonna let her do it."

Hall said after months of cajoling from Bregel, he would head to Veterans' Affairs the next day to hopefully set up housing.

He said as a veteran, he feels lucky to have that option. A lot of people are on long wait lists for temporary shelter, not even long-term housing. That area surrounding the airport has very few options for people seeking shelter. The King County Regional Homelessness Authority [database shows](#) there are no shelters available in SeaTac or Tukwila for people to go.

Even Bregel said it's difficult to know where to direct people.

"Unfortunately, a lot of the services that are available in the area are struggling due to low staffing," she said.

Bregel said she interacts with a few regulars who come back night after night, but most people just pass through. It's hard to reach every person who comes through a busy airport.

The Port says it is taking steps to bolster its [SEA Cares program](#) and add more people like Bregel to help unsheltered people once they leave the airport. The agency hired a mental health responder in November and added more crisis intervention training for Port officers.

Many people sleeping at the airport said they don't need this kind of intervention, however.

Late into the night, Miguel Mendoza's eyes looked tired but he wouldn't fall asleep until midnight, when the building quieted down.

Mendoza said he doesn't need a crisis coordinator or more police. He said he needs to get healthy so he can get a chef job again and afford to move back into a motel. The next day, he was headed to an interview at a restaurant.

"I just want to feel better for tomorrow, I hope. And this time tomorrow, I do my thing," he said.

He sat back in his chair and stifled a cough as he watched travelers shuffle by.

HEADLINE	01/11 UK civil servants set to strike on 1 Feb.
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-gb/money/other/one-hundred-thousand-civil-servants-to-strike-in-mass-walk-out-on-february-1/ar-AA16e9NM
GIST	<p>Around 100,000 civil servants are to strike on February 1 in a worsening dispute over jobs, pay and conditions, the Public and Commercial Services union announced.</p> <p>The mass walk-out by workers including Border Force, the DVLA and job centre staff is a massive ratcheting up of pressure by militant trade unions.</p> <p>It is the first time that members of the PCS in different government agencies have co-ordinated their strikes to take place at the same time in this latest period of unrest.</p> <p>The union said it will be the largest civil service strike for years and signals a 'significant escalation' of industrial action after a month of strikes by its members, including Border Force staff.</p> <p>The stoppage will coincide with the TUC's 'protect the right to strike' day, which was announced in reaction to the Government's controversial legislation on minimum service levels during industrial action.</p> <p>A further 33,000 PCS members working in five more departments, including HM Revenue & Customs, are next week re-balloting to join the union's national strike action.</p> <p>PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: 'During the last month, when thousands of PCS members across a range of departments took sustained industrial action, the Government said it had no money.</p> <p>'But it managed to find millions of pounds to spend on managers and military personnel in a failed attempt to cover the vital work our members do.</p> <p>'We warned the Government our dispute would escalate if they did not listen - and we're as good as our word.'</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Heroes: Ukraine's electric repair crews
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-electric-repair-crews-become-unlikely-wartime-heroes-11673447549?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>The workers clambering over the charred remains of an electricity transformer at a Ukrainian power station are fighting on one of the war's most important fronts: protecting Ukraine's power grid.</p> <p>Russia has targeted Ukraine's electricity supply with a blitz of drones and missiles, leaving businesses struggling and millions of people with sporadic heat and light in subzero temperatures.</p> <p>Rushing to rebuild the network are crews of engineers and others who work long and dangerous hours. At least 10 have died on the job since October, when the Russian barrages started, and energy workers are feted as heroes by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and average Ukrainians alike.</p> <p>"We are a battalion of electricians," said Volodymyr Ovdei, a 64-year-old worker.</p> <p>Late last month, a Russian missile slammed into the ground near the power station, one of Ukraine's largest, shredding power cables and knocking out a transformer, which converts electrical energy for transport and use in homes and businesses. That part of the power station had the capacity to generate enough electricity to power 57,000 small apartments.</p>

The coal-and-gas-powered station, owned by DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy generator, has been hit on three separate occasions in recent weeks.

Repair crews face the constant threat of bombardment and head into one of the plant's two shelters when air-raided warnings sound. When out repairing more distant parts of the grid, workers take cover where they can, such as under bridges. Closer to the front lines, some wear body armor and need military escorts. Workers have triggered mines and been hit by explosions and falling debris. They form tight bonds under pressure, and some workers have come out of retirement to replace the hundreds who have joined the armed forces.

Teams of around nine plan to work in three shifts over 24 hours to dismantle the transformer and replace it. But the country is running out of the parts needed, and [is scouring the world for replacements](#) to the mainly Soviet technology being destroyed.

"Of course it's dangerous, they work at the very edge of a power station," said a senior engineer, as he watched the team dismantle the transformer's blackened remains.

Some additional security measures have been taken to protect the plant from further attacks, including installing large concrete blocks to shield equipment.

Russian strikes targeting energy infrastructure, which began in October, have caused outages and forced rolling blackouts across the country as workers race to repair damage. On Monday, around 2.1 million households across the country were cut off from electricity, down from a high of 6 million on Nov. 23.

Ukraine's electricity is generated by nuclear energy—which in winter typically produces up to 60% of the country's power—as well as coal, gas and renewable sources. The electricity is then sent out on high-voltage transmission lines to be transformed at local substations into a lower voltage that can be distributed to nearby businesses and homes.

Russia has hit all parts of that chain and Ukraine is running out of the parts to fix it. At the coal-and-gas-fired power station, a separate group worked next to a second transformer that was also recently destroyed. It was made in the 1960s and will be hard to replace, the senior engineer said.

Europe and the U.S. use equipment that operates to different parameters, making it harder to offer replacements to Ukraine. Ukraine's power grid, for instance, transmits volts of up to 750,000, whereas grids in the rest of Europe are typically capped at 400,000 volts.

Last month, Japan's Hitachi Energy Ltd. donated 52 transformers that it had manufactured in Poland. CEZ Group, the Czech energy company, donated more than 30 pieces of old equipment, including transformers.

Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, has been a focus of Russian attacks on the electrical grid.

Andriy Toyunda, who is in charge of fixing and maintaining the electric supply for DTEK in the Kyiv region, likened his band of electrical workers to a family.

"Nobody has ever said, I am scared, I cannot go," he said.

At the start of the war, as Russian forces reached the outskirts of Kyiv, Mr. Toyunda didn't see his own family for three weeks, and slept in the office.

On Nov. 23, during what Mr. Toyunda described as the most damaging attack on the grid so far, Russian strikes shut down around 70% of Ukraine's energy capacity. Mr. Toyunda spent 48 hours working without sleep in rain and snow to fix four high-voltage cables that bring electricity into Kyiv.

Missile debris had damaged the cables in 30 separate places. New cable replaced two of those lines within six hours, reinstalling the power that pumps water around Kyiv, a city of around 3 million.

“Electricity is hospitals, it’s heating, it’s water, it’s communication,” said Oleh Braharlyk, a 54-year-old senior manager on the team.

On a recent day in Kyiv, this crew of nine, ranging in age from 22 to 71, were cutting the tops of trees that posed a risk to cables. As an air raid warning sounded, Mr. Toyunda said this sort of everyday maintenance was no less essential during wartime. Mr. Toyunda is on call 24 hours a day and always keeps his phone switched on. He no longer drinks alcohol so he is ready at all times, he said.

Mr. Toyunda, 41, is from a part of eastern Ukraine now occupied by Russia. He worked for several years in and around the port city of Mariupol, which fell to Russian control in May after weeks of bombardment.

Mr. Toyunda hired two former colleagues from the city for his own team. Roman Horbatiuk, 39, worked on fixing Mariupol’s grid under fire until late March.

Mr. Horbatiuk said he went to work with armed soldiers, who would make him lie down when Russian shells landed nearby. Wearing a bulletproof vest and helmet, he worked on cherry pickers and up transmission towers, making him a target for Russian fire.

“I closed my eyes [to it] and just got on with work,” he said.

Workers in Kyiv ignored loud explosions in the distance, which one crew member said were related to mine clearance north of the city. Staff could warm themselves in a large truck, with its own stove and large flask of coffee. They worked fast amid the silver birch and rusted transformer towers, stopping to smoke and talk only when the job was finished.

On Christmas Eve, the Kyiv team found out that a DTEK colleague had been killed while working. Crew members said such deaths motivate them further.

Ukrainians are now acknowledging a profession that doesn’t typically attract much attention.

Vehicles move aside to let DTEK’s vans pass, as they would for ambulances and the police. People approach workers to thank them, buying them coffee and hot food when they are out working. Mr. Horbatiuk says his children are now proud of the work he does.

“Finally, people in Ukraine respect the electrical workers,” he said.

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HEADLINE	01/12 China inflation up as Covid restrictions fall
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-inflation-picks-up-as-covid-19-restrictions-fall-11673500479?mod=hp_listb_pos4
GIST	<p>SINGAPORE—Inflation in China picked up in December and is expected to accelerate further in the months ahead as the economy revs up following Beijing’s abrupt dismantling of its zero-tolerance measures to contain Covid-19.</p> <p>Consumer prices rose 1.8% in December compared with a year earlier, faster than the 1.6% annual rate recorded in November, China’s national statistics bureau said Thursday.</p> <p>Economists expect the end of China’s draconian Covid restrictions will push up inflation in the country as consumers bid up the price of travel, medicine and other in-demand goods and services, and as companies have struggled with production disruptions caused by waves of sickness.</p> <p>The question for the world is to what extent China’s faster-than-expected reopening keeps up the pressure on global prices. More persistent global inflation as a consequence of China’s economy roaring back to</p>

life would risk delaying the moment at which central banks can halt or even reverse their aggressive interest-rate rises, economists say.

China scrapped most testing and quarantine requirements in early December, the first pivot away from a policy designed to stamp out even the smallest Covid-19 outbreaks that had endured since the pandemic took off in early 2020. On Sunday, Beijing ditched almost all public-health restrictions [on international travel](#), removing one of the most tangible symbols of China's Covid-era isolation.

The initial effects of the policy pivot have been disruptive. [Manufacturing and services activity fell in December](#), according to official gauges of activity, as businesses struggled with [absenteeism and supply-chain interruptions](#) and suppliers and truckers were caught up in the disruption. More recently, indicators such as subway ridership numbers and travel bookings suggest consumers are slowly returning to a semblance of normal life, though spending remains subdued relative to prepandemic norms.

Economists say the impact of these crosscurrents will be higher prices as the economy adjusts. Still, they don't think China is facing the kind of punishing inflation that took hold in the U.S. and Europe in the aftermath of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics in Singapore, said he expects annual inflation in China to peak around 2.5% some time this year, comfortably below the 3% level that serves as the government's desired ceiling for inflation. That means the People's Bank of China isn't likely to come under pressure to follow other central banks and raise interest rates, he said.

China's central bank in 2022 nudged down lending rates and funneled billions of yuan in cheap loans to banks and businesses, a policy easing that contrasted with a global central-bank tightening spree led by the U.S. Federal Reserve.

Unlike in China, data Thursday is expected to show annual inflation in the U.S. slowed to 6.5% in December, according to economists polled by The Wall Street Journal, from 7.1% in November and a peak of 9.1% in June. In the nations using the euro, annual inflation was 9.2% in December, down from a peak of 10.6% in October.

The Fed in December raised the benchmark federal-funds rate to between 4.25% and 4.5% and officials signaled that they expect to raise it further to a peak level of between 5% and 5.5% in 2023 and hold it there until some time in 2024, though some economists expect a slowing U.S. economy means a pivot away from tight policy could come sooner.

Economists say the likeliest way China's reopening would disrupt that timetable or those of other central banks would be through energy prices. Extra demand for oil and natural gas from China would risk keeping energy prices higher for longer, especially in a world of tight supplies caused in part by war in Ukraine.

"That's the channel through which China's reopening could have the biggest impact on inflation," Mr. Evans-Pritchard said. He said he doesn't think reopening will reverse a gradual easing of global inflationary pressures but that it could slow it.

December's pickup in inflation matched the 1.8% increase expected by economists surveyed by the Journal. The acceleration in inflation was driven by gains in food prices, data shows. Food prices rose 4.8% on year in December, compared with November's 3.7% increase. Nonfood prices increased 1.1 % on year, matching November's gain.

Highlighting the reopening effect, China's statistics bureau said the cost of travel and entertainment rose in December. The cost of airfares increased 26.7% compared with a year earlier as people rushed to book vacations. Car rental rates also rose.

	<p>As the weeklong Lunar New Year holiday, which starts Jan. 21 in China, approaches, the population has taken to the roads. In the first five days of the traditional peak-travel period, which began on Jan. 7, nearly 38 million passengers were traveling over national railways, highways, waterways and airways—a 41% increase from the same period a year earlier though still 49% lower than the level in the same period in 2019, according to official data released Thursday.</p> <p>Wan Jinsong, a senior official at China’s main economic planning office, the National Development and Reform Commission, said Thursday that the country is confident it can maintain stable prices this year, despite fluctuating global commodity prices and lingering pressures from imported inflation.</p> <p>Prices charged by companies at the factory gate fell 0.7% in December on the year, albeit at a slower pace than a month earlier. Economists expect producer-price inflation in China to stay subdued because of faltering overseas demand for its manufactured goods as the U.S. and Europe slow.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Calif. since 25 Dec: 8 atmospheric rivers
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2023/01/11/california-storms-atmospheric-rivers-end/
GIST	<p>Since Christmas, no fewer than eight atmospheric rivers — narrow but intense filaments of deep tropical moisture stretching thousands of miles across the Pacific — have bombarded California. The atmospheric rivers were aimed at the coast like a series of meteorological fire hoses, and at least 17 deaths have been attributed to the onslaught, which has brought damaging floods, landslides, downed trees and power outages.</p> <p>Prolific rain totals of 10 to 20 inches, up to 200 inches of mountain snow, winds approaching hurricane force and even a handful of tornado warnings have accompanied the promenade of storms. At long last, there is a possible pause in sight — probably in about 7 to 10 days — but not before several more episodes of heavy precipitation. And, if there is a pause, it’s too soon to know whether it will be sustained or short-lived.</p> <p>The latest wave of rain was soaking areas near and north of the Bay Area on Wednesday morning. That will taper into downpours mainly affecting Northern California near the Oregon border into Friday morning, before the possibility of more soaking rain for the Bay Area and Central Valley, and eventually areas farther south, into the weekend.</p> <p>That will then be followed by yet another gut punch to the beleaguered region on Monday into Tuesday.</p> <p>Flood watches and wind advisories blanket the northern two-thirds of California, with winter weather advisories in the mountains. Gusty winds at times mean an ongoing threat for downed trees and power outages. For now, the National Weather Service office serving the Bay Area writes that the “storm door remains open,” though there’s finally a glimmer of hope for sunnier days ahead.</p> <p>Storminess targets areas of Northern California through Friday</p> <p>On Wednesday, a large cyclone, or low-pressure system, was located about 1,000 miles offshore of the Pacific Northwest. Its counterclockwise spin was swirling ashore waves of moisture along a warm front, with widespread light to occasionally moderate rain.</p> <p>Rainfall will be steady on Wednesday, but not overly intense. The bulk of the precipitation will fall north of the Bay Area. A half-inch to an inch of rain is probable in San Francisco, with up to 1 to 2 inches north of the city through Wednesday night.</p> <p>On Thursday, rainfall ahead of an approaching cold front will be mainly confined in a north to south strip over northern coastal California. Most computer models suggest this will skirt north of the Bay Area, at least until Thursday night. Some models bring heavy rain back toward San Francisco on Thursday night into Friday, which could also push eastward into northern areas of the Central Valley.</p>

Areas along the Northern California coast could see 2 to 4 inches of rain through Friday, with 3 to 6 inches in the higher terrain of the Coastal Range. Closer to an inch is probable around San Francisco and Sacramento.

The Weather Service office serving the Bay Area cautioned, “additional accumulating precip will be problematic given saturated soils and full creeks/streams.”

“Storm drains and ditches may become clogged with debris,” wrote the National Weather Service in Sacramento. “Area creeks and streams are running high and could flood with more heavy rain.”

Significant atmospheric river on Saturday

A more significant atmospheric river will surge into California over the weekend. That will come as the aforementioned low-pressure system over the northeast Pacific shifts to the north and east, tugging a jet of moisture into much of the state, progressing from north to south.

Coastal areas over almost the entire state as well as the Central Valley could see another 1 to 3 inches of rain, including around the Bay Area, Sacramento, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. At least 2 to 4 inches are probable in the higher terrain in places where it’s too warm to snow. In the high elevations of the Sierra Nevada, a few more feet of snow are probable.

Grand finale early next week?

Yet another atmospheric river will affect California late Sunday into Monday or Tuesday.

While it’s too early to pinpoint rainfall or snow totals, a general inch or two of rain can be expected in Northern California, with amounts probably waning as one heads farther south.

It’s not out of the question that one more atmospheric river will come ashore in the middle of next week, but it’s uncertain where it could hit and its intensity.

Pattern change possible in 7 to 10 days

Some time late next week, there are signs that high pressure will become established over the eastern Pacific, moving into a position that will deflect the eastward-moving atmospheric rivers toward the Pacific Northwest.

This prediction is far enough into the future that [it’s not a guarantee](#), and there’s no telling exactly how long this less stormy pattern might persist.

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HEADLINE	01/12 More schools: panic buttons, locks, police
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/01/12/school-shootings-safety-data/
GIST	<p>More schools across the nation have installed security cameras, added locks inside of classrooms and stepped up a raft of other security measures, according to new federal data released amid heightened safety concerns less than a week after another unfathomable school shooting.</p> <p>The data, from the National Center for Education Statistics, painted a portrait of schools increasingly turning to new protocols and equipment to keep violence at bay. Schools reporting that they had panic buttons or silent alarms with a direct connection to law enforcement jumped to 43 percent in November 2022, from 29 percent during the 2017-2018 school year.</p> <p>Nearly 65 percent of schools now have anonymous or confidential threat-reporting systems — up 15 percentage points during the same period. And half of schools reported having police trained to work in schools, known as school resource officers, on campus at least once a week — a number that was up five percentage points.</p>

Experts attributed at least part of the spike to the seemingly regular drumbeat of school shootings. More than 331,000 children at more than 350 schools have experienced gun violence during school hours since the Columbine High School massacre in 1999, according to a [Washington Post analysis](#).

Just six months before the federal data was collected, a mass killing at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Tex., left 19 children and two teachers dead, setting off a wave of grief and anger.

“It’s not just Uvalde,” said Ron Avi Astor, a professor at the University of California at Los Angeles who studies school safety. “It’s decades of shootings that are horrific, and it’s not just in schools. It’s supermarkets and movie theaters, music events, and just the randomness.”

But Astor said that the increased security arrives in schools at the same time as more mental health initiatives and greater attention to student well-being. “It’s not an either-or,” he said. Like others, he cautioned against the “prisonization” of schools.

Sheldon Greenberg, a professor emeritus at Johns Hopkins University, said there is a delicate balance between maintaining safety and frightening people.

“You don’t want to increase the safety measures to the point where you are increasing fear,” Greenberg said. He also pointed out that adding security cameras or other technology does not make a difference unless it is “applied well and monitored.”

“The technology’s good, so long as it’s well maintained and there are people who are available who know what they’re doing to use it,” he said.

Schools safety practices have been in the spotlight for years, particularly in the aftermath of devastating [rampages like the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School](#), where a gunman killed 20 children and six staff members in 2012.

[Last week’s shooting](#) of a 25-year-old teacher, allegedly by a first-grade student, at Richneck Elementary School in Newport News, Va., added to the disbelief of the potential for unexpected violence in a place where children are supposed to feel safe: school.

But it’s important to remember that schools remain one of the safest places around, said Dewey Cornell, a professor of education at the University of Virginia and a longtime school safety researcher. Cornell said he is skeptical of expensive security measures that have little evidence of effectiveness.

“Security measures can divert funding from student support services like counseling and mental health programs which have been shown to reduce student aggression,” he said in an email. “The prevention of violence has to start before a student comes to school with a gun.”

Devices like panic buttons feed into public fear, Cornell said. “Administrators have told me they feel pressured to support such measures not because they think they work but because parents demand them and school boards want something concrete that shows their concern for safety,” he said.

A student or teacher is far more likely to be shot in a restaurant or store or at home than in a school, Cornell said.

The new data, released Thursday, came from a survey administered to more than 1,000 schools and largely answered by principals. Officials at NCES, the statistical center of the Department of Education, compared the results with those from the [School Survey on Crime and Safety for 2017-2018](#).

Among the findings that stood out: By far, most schools had written plans for handling active shooters, natural disasters, hostage situations, bomb incidents, suicide threats, and post-crisis reunification of students with their families.

	<p>In a sign of how the world has changed, just 46 percent of schools made plans for handling pandemics five years ago. Amid the covid-19 crisis, 82 percent do.</p> <p>In other findings, nearly 70 percent of schools reported they “strongly agree” that school resource officers have a positive effect.</p> <p>“That’s pretty strong,” said Mo Canady, executive director of the National Association of School Resource Officers. “I’d love for that number to be even higher.”</p> <p>Canady said the number of SROs wearing body cameras has been on the rise for several years. More than half of SROs or others in law enforcement routinely wear body cameras at schools, according to the data — a nearly 60 percent spike since 2017-2018.</p> <p>There are a lot of benefits to the cameras, he said. “It can certainly tell the truth of what happened, whether it’s in the officer’s favor or not,” he said.</p> <p>But Canady also said that privacy protections are important and that law enforcement agencies have to craft “sound policies and procedures.”</p> <p>Seventy-two percent of schools reported a lack of adequate placements or programs for disruptive students that limited their efforts to reduce misbehavior.</p> <p>A collection of other school practices, though, was on the rise. While nearly all schools — 97 percent — reported controlling access to school buildings during the day, there was a 15-point increase — to 66 percent — in the percentage of schools that control access to school grounds during the day.</p> <p>There was also an uptick in schools that said they train teachers about self-harm and suicidal tendencies; recognizing bullying behaviors; discipline policies about alcohol and drug use; and recognizing early warning signs of violent behavior.</p> <p>Training on signs of mental health disorders that may require intervention or referral increased most, to 82 percent from 60 percent.</p> <p>More than 80 percent of schools reported they provide an electronic notification system to alert parents in case of an emergency — up nine points — and 92 percent use security cameras, up eight points.</p> <p>Lesser-used security measures included daily metal detector checks (6 percent of schools), clear book bags (7 percent) and random sweeps for contraband (25 percent).</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Top conflict hot spots, crises in 2023
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/11/conflict-crisis-2023-year/
GIST	<p>For many Western policymakers, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is the all-defining crisis of the moment. That’s understandable: An open war in Europe of this scale marked an epochal moment on the continent, realigning grand strategy in major European capitals and reinvigorating the transatlantic alliance. Meanwhile, the war’s ripple effects — shocks to supply chains, energy markets and global food systems — have fed into other crises far away, from West Africa to South Asia.</p> <p>But there’s a lot more to worry about in the world. Two recent studies — one by a think tank, the other by a humanitarian international organization — lay out the challenges that should vex global policymakers in 2023.</p> <p>The annual Preventive Priorities Survey, released by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), polled more than 500 U.S. government officials, policymakers and academics on the likelihood of certain events</p>

transpiring this year and what their impact would be on U.S. interests. It sorted these contingencies into a three-tiered ranking of potential hot spots and crises — at least from the vantage point of Washington.

Intriguingly, the report noted that for the first time since 2008, when the survey of foreign policy elites started being conducted, “the possibility of a foreign terrorist organization inflicting a mass casualty attack on the United States or a treaty ally was not proposed as a plausible contingency.” **In other words, “from the perspective of those responding, the 9/11 era is over,” Paul Stares, head of CFR’s Center for Preventive Action, said at a Tuesday briefing.**

The seven most pressing threats in 2023 enumerated by the survey are as follows: The advent of “a severe cross-strait crisis” that pulls the United States into a confrontation with China over Taiwan; an escalation in the Ukraine war that sees “unconventional weapons spillover into neighboring countries”; a cyberattack hitting U.S. critical infrastructure; economic collapse and social unrest within Russia because of the toll of the war, leading to a destabilizing spiral; North Korea stepping up its testing of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles; Israel’s right-wing government taking covert or direct action against Iran’s nuclear program, with diplomacy over Tehran’s nuclear capabilities at a dead end; and the possibility of natural disaster and social unrest in Central America spawning a new surge of migration to the United States.

“Every conversation I’ve had about Ukraine over the course of the year has at some point moved to Taiwan,” said Suzanne Maloney, vice president and director of foreign policy at the Brookings Institution, a leading think tank. Speaking at the same CFR briefing, Maloney gestured to the widespread feeling of concern in Washington that [China is priming itself for an invasion](#) of the island democracy at its doorstep.

This rundown of what’s most vexing U.S. policymakers still misses a whole other world of crisis. Last month, the International Rescue Committee unveiled [its annual emergency watch list](#) of 20 countries most at risk of humanitarian calamity. Ukraine, though in the grips of a ruinous war, is only 10th in the IRC ranking. Other countries are in even more dire conditions: At the top of the list are the Horn of Africa nations of Somalia and Ethiopia, [stricken by drought and war](#). Hundreds of thousands of people are already living under famine conditions in these two countries, with aid agencies warning of far greater depredations to come. In Somalia, close to half the population is already in need of humanitarian assistance.

Then there’s Afghanistan, which dropped from the top spot on the watch list only because of the severity of the crises in East Africa. The economic collapse that was compounded by the takeover of the Taliban has immiserated much of the country. The political impasse over Kabul — the Taliban are international pariahs and have their foreign reserves frozen by U.S. sanctions — is only making things worse. “Despite efforts to engage the [Taliban government], a plan to address Afghanistan’s economic collapse has not been agreed upon,” the IRC noted. “With almost the entire population now living in poverty and preparing for another long winter, an escalation in humanitarian need is a risk in 2023.”

As [I reported earlier](#), for humanitarian organizations, the war in Ukraine has been a double tragedy — triggering a cascading series of pressures that impacted poor nations elsewhere, while also leading the entreaties of aid agencies last year to fall on somewhat deaf ears. We knew for months that Somalia faced a devastating epidemic of hunger, but humanitarian officials say the funding and international response has come late.

The 20 countries on the IRC watch list account for some 90 percent of people in the world who need humanitarian assistance, 81 percent of people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes, 80 percent of those who are acutely food insecure and only 1.6 percent of global gross domestic product. Their precarity is, in and of itself, a reflection of vast inequities that shape the global system.

“Most of the crises in Watchlist countries are not new,” IRC President and CEO David Miliband wrote in a foreword to the annual report. “But the fact that these crises are protracted does not make them any less urgent. The primary reason we are seeing worrying new record levels of need is because three key accelerators of crisis — armed conflict, climate change and economic turmoil — are driving long-standing crises to new extremes. And, in some instances, they are sparking new crises as well.”

HEADLINE	01/11 Risk from XBB.1.5 uncertain?
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/science/2023/01/xbbs-1-5-still-more-questions-than-answers-on-risk-of-latest-omicron-subvariant/
GIST	<p>Amid a winter wave of COVID-19 in the US, the latest coronavirus omicron subvariant, XBB.1.5, has grabbed headlines due to its swift rise, raising fears of another towering spike in the disease. But the spotlight is revealing more questions than answers in the early days of the subvariant, which has ominously been described as one of the most immune-evasive omicron subvariants to date.</p> <p>Last week, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention quietly downgraded estimates of its prevalence. As Ars and other outlets reported, the CDC previously estimated that XBB.1.5 accounted for 40.5 percent of COVID-19 cases throughout the country in the week ending on December 31, with the highest prevalence in the Northeast. But last Friday, the agency updated the estimates with a backlog of sequencing data from over the holidays, which indicated XBB.1.5 accounted for 18 percent of cases nationwide that week—not 40.5 percent. Currently, the CDC estimates that XBB.1.5 accounted for 27.6 percent of cases nationwide in the week ending on January 7. But the 95 percent prediction interval is wide, spanning 14 percent to 46.5 percent).</p> <p>The updated estimate still indicates that the variant, first detected in New York in October, is on the rise. But the uncertainty throws a wrench in estimates of its transmission advantage over other omicron subvariant, BQ.1.1 is still the most prevalent omicron subvariant, accounting for an estimated 34 percent of cases in the US.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the World Health Organization released a rapid risk assessment for XBB.1.5, concluding that it "may contribute to increases in case incidence" worldwide but that the agency's overall confidence in that assessment is "low." WHO noted that "as of the date of publication, available data are available only from one country [the US], and therefore confidence in a global assessment is low."</p> <p>Additionally, the agency found that there is no data on the question of disease severity from XBB.1.5 infections. However, the agency noted that "XBB.1.5 does not carry any mutation known to be associated with potential change in severity."</p> <p>It deemed its confidence level "moderate" in the assessment that XBB.1.5 is among the most immune-evasive omicron subvariants so far. Early laboratory work using pseudotyped viruses to assess neutralizing antibody responses suggests that XBB.1.5 is equally immune evasive as XBB.1, which is the omicron subvariant with the highest immune escape to date.</p> <p>Uncertainty</p> <p>Overall, it's unclear how XBB.1.5 will play in the US or worldwide. As Ars reported last week, some areas of the US that are seeing post-holiday rises in hospitalizations are also seeing a high spread of XBB.1.5—but not all of them.</p> <p>XBB.1.5 has popped up in numerous countries outside the US, with the UK having the next highest level of detections. It has also been detected at very low levels in Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) reported earlier this week.</p> <p>The ECDC echoed the assessment from WHO, noting recent work suggesting that XBB.1.5 doesn't appear to be <i>more</i> immune evasive than its upstream subvariant XBB.1, which is a hybrid of two BA.2 sublineages. But, XBB.1.5 may be better at binding the human receptor, ACE2, the gateway to viral entry into human cells. This "could indicate that the advantage of XBB.1.5 compared to XBB.1 could be caused by an increase in intrinsic transmissibility," the ECDC speculated.</p>

Still, like WHO, the ECDC ended with an equivocal assessment of the risk XBB.1.5 poses. "There is a risk that this variant may have an increasing effect on the number of cases of COVID-19 in the EU/EEA, but not within the coming month as the variant is currently only present at very low levels in the EU/EEA," the agency wrote. "Due to uncertainties associated with the growth rate of the variant, this assessment is associated with a high degree of uncertainty."

Back in the US, COVID-19 hospitalizations have risen 15 percent in the last two weeks, now averaging over 46,600 per day, and deaths have increased 50 percent, with a daily average of 580, according to [data tracking](#) by The New York Times.

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HEADLINE	01/11 NY adds \$35M to cybersecurity budget
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/new-york-state-adds-35-million-to-2023-cybersecurity-budget-as-attacks-soar/
GIST	<p>New York Governor Kathy Hochul is adding an additional \$35 million in funding to the state's \$61.9 million cybersecurity budget for this year, while also creating a new team focusing on protecting critical infrastructure.</p> <p>This week, Hochul said she decided to add the additional funding to the budget because the "frequency, magnitude, and impact of cyberattacks have increased."</p> <p>"The Industrial Control Systems assessment team, coupled with record investments, will support physical security and cybersecurity assessment programs to help facilities improve their cybersecurity posture, creating a safer and more secure Empire State," she said.</p> <p>The Office of Counterterrorism within New York's Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services will create the team, which will focus on the energy, transportation and manufacturing sectors. New York DHS and Emergency Services Commissioner Jackie Bray noted that the state has had to ramp up its cybersecurity investments in recent years and partner with critical infrastructure operators to limit disruptions.</p> <p>The state has faced several high profile attacks, including on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in April 2021, which was hacked by a group based in China.</p> <p>Last year, the information of 820,000 current and former New York City public school students was leaked following the hack of a digital education platform.</p> <p>And most recently, several counties have been crippled by ransomware attacks, including Rockland County and Suffolk County – one of the biggest in the state.</p> <p>The governor's office noted that the state's high profile makes it a ripe target for hackers and noted that since 2017, more than 3,600 state, local, and tribal governments across the country have been hit with ransomware.</p> <p>The increase in attacks is part of why Hochul tapped digital security veteran Colin Ahern to be the state's first-ever Chief Cyber Officer in June 2022.</p> <p>"As the threats to our digital infrastructure continue to evolve and grow in sophistication, it is more important than ever that we invest in the resources to protect New Yorkers from cyber threats," Ahern said this week.</p> <p>The additional \$35.2 million will go toward expanding the "shared services to local governments that help identify security gaps that could be exploited by an adversary" and other cybersecurity enhancements statewide.</p>

	<p>The funding will also support county-level cybersecurity funding through fiscal year 2024 and the New York State Joint Security Operations Center, as well as the implementation of endpoint detection technology.</p> <p>“These shared services help county and local governments assess and remedy gaps in their cyber defenses,” the governor’s office said.</p> <p>“The shared services complement the State’s ongoing efforts to build a common picture of cyber threats shared by cybersecurity teams from federal, state, city and county governments, publicly and privately owned critical infrastructure, and State agencies including the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, Office of Information Technology Services, New York State Police, among others.”</p> <p>The increase in funding mirrors initiatives in several other states. Illinois governor J.B. Pritzker pledged \$30.2 million in cybersecurity funding for 2023 while Arizona plans to spend \$10 million in 2023 to launch a statewide cybersecurity readiness grant program and provide cybersecurity tools to local governments and school districts. Both Florida and Maryland have made multi-year pledges of more than \$100 million toward cybersecurity efforts.”</p> <p>New Jersey also recently announced its own cybersecurity initiatives centered around banning the use of certain technologies in government offices or on state-provided devices, including Tik Tok, Huawei, WeChat, Alibaba products, ZTE and Kaspersky Lab.</p> <p>Governor Phil Murphy said the measures would “ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and safety of information assets managed by New Jersey State government” and were taken so the state could be “unified against actors who may seek to divide us.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Soaring food, energy prices next 2 years?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/jan/11/soaring-food-and-energy-prices-could-persist-for-next-two-years-davos
GIST	<p>Soaring prices for energy and food could persist for the next two years, hurting global efforts to combat poverty and the climate crisis, a report prepared for next week’s World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, has warned.</p> <p>The WEF’s annual global risks report found the international cost of living crisis unleashed by the Covid pandemic and Russia’s war in Ukraine topped the list of concerns in a survey of more than 1,200 global experts, policymakers and business leaders.</p> <p>Sounding the alarm in the run-up to the annual gathering of world leaders in the Swiss mountain resort, it said the energy and food supply crunch was likely to persist for the next two years as the biggest risk to the world economy.</p> <p>Highlighting how the pandemic and the war in Europe have triggered a series of deeply interconnected global risks, it said the fallout could undermine collaboration between countries to tackle longer-term problems including the climate crisis, protecting biodiversity, and efforts to reduce poverty.</p> <p>“These create follow-on risks that will dominate the next two years: the risk of recession; growing debt distress; a continued cost of living crisis; polarised societies enabled by disinformation and misinformation; a hiatus on rapid climate action; and zero-sum geo-economic warfare,” the report said.</p> <p>The WEF report, produced in partnership with Marsh McLennan and Zurich Insurance Group, argued that a “window for action” on the most serious long-term threats was closing rapidly.</p>

	<p>“Concerted, collective action is needed before risks reach a tipping point,” it said. “Unless the world starts to cooperate more effectively on climate mitigation and climate adaptation, over the next 10 years this will lead to continued global warming and ecological breakdown.”</p> <p>Inflation has soared in many countries around the world after the hit to the global economy from Covid was followed by Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine driving up wholesale energy costs and disrupting food supply chains.</p> <p>A third of the world economy is expected to be in recession in 2023, reflecting the effects of the war, lingering high inflation and the rising cost of borrowing for households, businesses and governments as major central banks push up interest rates.</p> <p>Saadia Zahidi, a managing director at the World Economic Forum, said: “The short-term risk landscape is dominated by energy, food, debt and disasters. Those that are already the most vulnerable are suffering – and in the face of multiple crises, those who qualify as vulnerable are rapidly expanding, in rich and poor countries alike.</p> <p>“Climate and human development must be at the core of concerns of global leaders, even as they battle current crises. Cooperation is the only way forward.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 FAA alert system outage led to disruptions
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/11/us-flights-disrupted-after-faa-alert-system-outage
GIST	<p>Domestic flights across the US were temporarily grounded on Wednesday morning, after an IT failure in a critical aviation safety system.</p> <p>The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said that the system that alerts pilots and airlines about any hazards was not functioning. The breakdown led to more than 7,800 flights being delayed and 1,200 being canceled, the flight tracking website FlightAware showed.</p> <p>The ground stop was lifted at 9am with the FAA declaring that operations were “resuming gradually across the United States”, but travelers were still left facing another chaotic day of air travel following severe disruptions over the holiday period.</p> <p>“They don’t know what the cause is,” Joe Biden told reporters after speaking to the transportation secretary, Pete Buttigieg. “Aircraft can still land safely, just not take off right now. They don’t know what the cause of it is, they expect in a couple of hours they’ll have a good sense of what caused it and will respond at that time.”</p> <p>The White House said there was no evidence of a cyber-attack but the causes of the IT failure would be investigated in full by the Department of Transportation.</p> <p>International US-bound flights were continuing to take off from Europe and elsewhere.</p> <p>The aviation regulator said its Notam (Notice to Air Missions) system had “failed” and it was working to restore it.</p> <p>It said: “While some functions are beginning to come back on line, National Airspace System operations remain limited.”</p> <p>The FAA said it had “ordered airlines to pause all domestic departures until 9am ET to allow the agency to validate the integrity of flight and safety information”.</p> <p>Jordan Cousins, 25, on his way to Nashville on Southwest Airlines from New York’s LaGuardia, said his flight had been delayed twice and then canceled entirely.</p>

“I’ve been here since 7am and this pushes back everything I was trying to do. First I thought it was a cyber-attack, but they said it was some kind of malfunction. So I had all sorts of curiosities,” he said.

Crowley said he had noticed that US air travel had become precarious.

“Travelling is coming a bit of a hassle. It’s this and then it’s that. You never know. You may have a smooth flight or there may be a problem. It may be at the counter, with the plane, or something,” he said. “Plans never go as planned.”

The White House press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, said: “There is no evidence of a cyber-attack at this point, but the president directed [the Department of Transportation] to conduct a full investigation into the causes. The FAA will provide regular updates.”

Wednesday’s chaos came after a troubled holiday season for air travelers. Bad weather led to the cancellation of thousands of flights, a situation compounded by issues at Southwest Airlines that led to the cancellation of thousands more.

More than 20,000 flights were scheduled to depart airports in the US on Wednesday, according to aviation analytics firm Cirium, with almost 2.9m seats.

The delays affected carriers around the US. American Airlines, the biggest carrier by volume, said it was working with the FAA to minimise disruption. United Airlines said it had paused all domestic flights.

A Notam is a notice containing information essential to personnel concerned with flight operations, but not known far enough in advance to be publicised by other means.

Information can go up to 200 pages for long-haul international flights and may include items such as runway closures, general bird hazard warnings or low-altitude construction obstacles.

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HEADLINE	01/11 Brazil’s capital steps up security
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/11/security-tightened-in-brazil-amid-fear-of-attacks-by-jair-bolsonaro-supporters
GIST	<p>Security has been stepped up in Brazil’s capital amid concerns that hardcore supporters of the former president Jair Bolsonaro were planning to mobilise again, three days after thousands of extremists launched what the government has called a botched coup attempt.</p> <p>Reports in the Brazilian media said far-right activists had summoned “a mega nationwide protest to retake power” on Wednesday afternoon. On Tuesday night, members of the national public security force in black SUVs could be seen taking up position along the esplanade leading to Brazil’s congress, supreme court and presidential palace – the three buildings stormed and ransacked during Sunday’s turmoil in Brasília.</p> <p>The official put in charge of the capital’s security by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva after Sunday’s turmoil, Ricardo Cappelli, promised citizens that “under no hypothesis” would such “unacceptable events” be repeated if Bolsonaro backers returned to the streets on Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>Peaceful protests were part of democracy, Cappelli told reporters. “But the right to protest cannot be confused with attacks on democratic institutions. The right to demonstrate cannot be confused with terrorist behaviour.”</p> <p>As the capital braced for possible further outbreaks of unrest, federal police said they had arrested one of the alleged organisers of the 8 January invasions in a city 32 miles from Brasília.</p>

Ana Priscila Azevedo allegedly used a Telegram group to urge tens of thousands of Bolsonarista radicals to head to the capital to challenge the recent election of the leftist president, which Bolsonaro supporters refuse to accept. "Babylon will fall," Azevedo reportedly declared.

Senior members of Brazil's security apparatus have also been implicated in the catastrophic security failure, which one of Lula's top ministers on Tuesday called "an act of terrorism" designed to topple their week-old government.

Late on Tuesday, federal police officers raided the home of Bolsonaro's former justice minister, Anderson Torres, while the former commander of Brasília's military police, Fábio Augusto Vieira, was arrested. A warrant for the arrest of Torres – the city's public security chief at the time of Sunday's attacks – has also been issued. Like Bolsonaro, who flew out of Brazil on the eve of Lula's 1 January inauguration, Torres is currently in the US, purportedly on holiday, but said he would return to Brazil and present himself to authorities. "I'm certain the truth will prevail," he wrote on social media.

As federal police continued their pursuit of the participants and orchestrators of the rightwing rebellion, forensic specialists combed through the ruins of the supreme court in search of leads.

On Tuesday afternoon, a team of 98 federal police forensic specialists were working their way through the wrecked structure using a 3,000 dots per inch camera to photograph finger and palm prints on cans of paint and shattered windows. So far 46 invaders have been identified through the court's security camera system.

The Guardian was allowed into the building with a group of local and foreign journalists to document the desecration of the architect Oscar Niemeyer's 1958 masterpiece.

The court's ground-floor windows had been smashed and scrawled with a puzzling mixture of profanity and faith. "Fuck you, you prick," read one slogan near the pulverised chamber where the court's hearings are held. "Leave our children in peace," read another. A third quoted Psalm 33: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."

Nearby, a bronze bust of Themis, the goddess of divine law and order, by the Brazilian sculptor Alfredo Ceschiatti, lay on its side on a carpet of glass and spent rubber-bullet casings.

"What most saddens me is the destruction of works of art ... busts, photographs, historical documents, paintings by master painters, presents from kings and queens ... It all shows such a low level of civility," said one of the crime scene investigators.

"I've been to the scene of many bank explosions but there the damage is more concentrated. Here it is far worse, far uglier, far more striking," he added.

Minutes earlier, the court's former president Gilmar Mendes had arrived to tour the debris of the court he presided over from 2008 to 2010. "I feel a little piece of me has been destroyed. I spent so many years here," Mendes said, fighting back tears.

"This was [an attack] of monstrous brutality," the former supreme court judge told reporters. "We are shocked and we must ask ourselves how we reached this point and how we can avoid this even happening again here."

Despite the fears of further unrest, members of Lula's government insist they are working to reestablish normality and prevent further insurrection attempts.

Two new ministers will be sworn in at the presidential palace on Wednesday afternoon: the racial equality minister, Anielle Franco, and Sônia Guajajara, the head of Brazil's first-ever ministry for Indigenous peoples.

	“All of Brazil’s black and Indigenous women will be taking office with us because this government is ours and the country is ours too,” Franco wrote on Facebook.
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HEADLINE	01/11 Canada ER deaths expose healthcare crisis
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/11/canada-healthcare-crisis-emergency-room-death
GIST	<p>When Allison Holthoff entered a crowded Nova Scotia hospital at the end of December, the intense pain in her abdomen worsened with each hour she spent waiting for treatment. With the emergency room under renovations, overwhelmed staff triaged a stream of incoming patients in a makeshift treatment area.</p> <p>“I feel like I’m dying. They’re going to let me die here,” Holthoff told her husband, Gunther.</p> <p>After more than seven hours of waiting, she went into cardiac arrest. She was resuscitated three times by health professionals, who spotted internal bleeding on an X-ray, but staff determined her organs had sustained too much damage and it was unlikely she would survive.</p> <p>“It was a terrible situation for my wife, for my kids and a lot of people in the community,” Gunther Holthoff told reporters earlier this week at a press conference, saying his wife had been “neglected” as her condition deteriorated. “I’m just lost.”</p> <p>While no cause of death has yet been identified, the case has nonetheless prompted calls by local politicians for an investigation into the Canadian province’s emergency room backlog. But Holthoff’s death is also the latest fatality to expose a mounting crisis in the country’s hospitals, which have been worn down by waves of respiratory viruses and exacerbated by a chronic staffing shortage.</p> <p>Last summer, many emergency rooms in rural communities shut down. In larger cities, people waited dozens of hours for emergency care. At Canada’s largest children’s hospital, SickKids, a four-year-old child was separated from his family and flown more than 350km (217 miles) for treatment of a near-fatal sepsis infection amid overcrowding.</p> <p>“Emergency rooms are the barometer for our healthcare system,” said David Carr, a physician and professor of emergency medicine at the University of Toronto. “We’re facing the ‘perfect storm’ – we’ve been thrown a virus that is crippled our healthcare system and while we’ve managed to get ahold of it in many ways, what we have not [is] coming to grips with is the sheer attrition of nurses and healthcare team members.”</p> <p>While the winter months are typically the worst times for emergency rooms as respiratory viruses take hold, Canada’s shortage of health professionals – and the rising rate of burnout – is making a bad problem worse.</p> <p>“Clearly the cracks have been exposed,” said Carr, pointing out that colleagues in other provinces often share “frightening numbers” that lay bare the overflowing waiting rooms and a struggle to allocate limited beds.</p> <p>Further compounding the staffing shortage, healthcare systems across the country are experiencing a “geriatric tsunami” of ageing patients whose care requires a growing share of healthcare budgets and efforts.</p> <p>In recent months, these crises have brought healthcare systems to a breaking point. As medicine falls under provincial jurisdiction – but is funded by the federal government – political leaders at various levels of government have feuded over fixes to a languishing system.</p> <p>Amid a shortage of family doctors, more cases that should be addressed earlier are ending up in the country’s emergency rooms.</p>

	<p>“Sometimes you will hear stories of terrible outcomes happening in emergency department waiting times. But what often isn’t seen is the effect of those delays,” said Carr. “The press picks up on these terrible catastrophes that happened in the waiting room. But they missed out on the morbidity of conditions that happen as a result of delay of care, of people not being able to assess a primary care physician.”</p> <p>Making the shortage worse, Canadian medical students who study abroad are often unable to practice medicine when they return home due to arduous licensing requirements.</p> <p>“I tell parents of prospective medical students, if you send your kid away, there’s a reasonable chance that he or she will never come back if they train abroad, even if it’s in the United States,” said Carr.</p> <p>Provincial premiers recently floated a proposal that would make it easier for foreign-trained nurses and doctors to earn Canadian credentials. But experts warn the move cannot be made quickly and requires more resources than simply rubber-stamping paperwork.</p> <p>Without a single factor alone breaking the emergency rooms, Carr fears no quick solution is possible – and worries political leaders remain unable to fix a crisis that healthcare workers have long warned was looming.</p> <p>“I feel like for years, our complaints have fallen on deaf ears,” he said. “And now I worry that we’re facing a pandemic of significant mental health challenges in our healthcare community. We have a compounding threat that needs to be addressed today, not tomorrow.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Nationwide logjam snarls flights, travelers
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/faa-suffers-glitch-to-crew-alert-system-potentially-affecting-flights-in-u-s-11673437407?mod=hp_lead_pos2
GIST	<p>An outage with a federal pilot-alert system cascaded into a nationwide logjam at U.S. airports Wednesday, snarling thousands of flights and temporarily stranding travelers across the country.</p> <p>The breakdown of the Federal Aviation Administration’s Notice to Air Missions system, which provides safety information to pilots, led the agency to issue a nationwide “ground stop” that halted domestic departures for nearly two hours, before flights were permitted to resume shortly after 9 a.m. ET.</p> <p>The FAA said late Wednesday its preliminary investigation had traced the outage to a damaged database file. The breakdown prompted airlines to delay flights for hours Wednesday, and contributed to more than 1,000 cancellations. It also marked another large-scale disruption for the U.S. air travel industry, following crew scheduling system problems at Southwest Airlines Co. LUV -0.66%decrease; red down pointing triangle over the holiday travel period that led the carrier to cancel thousands of flights over several days.</p> <p>The episode highlighted the fragility of the nation’s air-transportation system and reliance on aging technology. A government official said Wednesday’s ground stop appeared to be the first such flight-ban nationwide since the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The disruption came as airlines and regulators have butted heads in recent months over who is to blame for flight disruptions and what can be done to prevent them.</p> <p>Biden administration officials and cybersecurity experts said that the FAA’s system outage didn’t appear to be the result of a cyberattack, though the White House said an investigation would occur. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said his priority was to make sure the air-traffic system was back up and running, and then determine the root cause to prevent a recurrence.</p> <p>“When there’s a problem with a government system, we’re going to own it, going to find it, and we’re going to fix it,” Mr. Buttigieg said.</p>

In Canada, a similar alert system providing safety information to airlines [also suffered an outage](#) Wednesday. NAV Canada's Notam entry system went down at about 10:20 a.m. ET and was restored at roughly 1:15 pm, according to a spokeswoman for the Ottawa-based not-for-profit organization.

"While we are still investigating the root cause, preliminary indications are that the issue was related to an isolated IT hardware failure, and not related to a cyber attack," the spokeswoman said.

Wednesday's problems arose from a system that the FAA uses to notify commercial airline pilots, cargo planes and military officials about restrictions to flight operations that emerge in real time. The notices, packed with technical information that can span multiple pages, relay information such as airport runway closures, nearby airspace activity and heights at which pilots can decide to safely land.

Without reading Notice to Air Missions, [known as Notams](#), before their flight, pilots aren't allowed under federal regulators to take off, former and current government and industry officials said.

The FAA's pilot-notice system has suffered multiple outages in recent years that have drawn little notice, partly because regulators and airline-operations officials have been able to work through any disruptions, according to current and former government and industry officials.

The FAA has been working to overhaul the Notam system, but it isn't expected to be completed for about two years, a government official said. Parts of the current system are relatively new while an older legacy component continues to do much of the heavy lifting, the official said.

"The government in general has the same problem that industry has, in that these systems get old and modernizing them is really painful, both in terms of money and time," said Ira Gershkoff, a principal consultant at airline IT consulting and research firm Travel Technology Research Ltd.

FAA officials on Wednesday were examining what led to this week's problems, including the possibility they may be related to a routine software update or faulty data entry, current and former government officials said. Such routine updates have led to problems and disruptions in the past, they said.

The first sign of trouble emerged Tuesday afternoon, when, at 3:28 p.m. ET, an FAA advisory stated that the system failed. "Technicians are currently working to restore the system and there is no estimate for restoration of service at this time," the advisory said.

U.S. airline officials said flights were still able to operate Tuesday afternoon and evening as the FAA spooled up a back-up system. By late that night, some airline officials said they believed the situation was under control, only to be called back to work a few hours later, after midnight, when the problems appeared to worsen.

Overnight and early Wednesday morning, carriers were able to manually check for fresh notices by calling individual facilities such as airport control towers, one of the airline officials said, but that became cumbersome as phone systems became overloaded.

A backup, redundant system kicked in Tuesday night, Mr. Buttigieg said, but officials determined the system wasn't providing accurate information. By Wednesday morning, he said, the FAA took steps to reboot the entire system.

Without the problems resolved by 7 a.m. ET, officials moved to a nationwide ground stop.

[United Airlines Holdings](#) Inc. had already paused its operation. Other airlines, including [Delta Air Lines](#) Inc. and cargo carrier [FedEx](#) Corp., privately believed operations could continue despite Notam system outage, according to government and industry officials.

[JetBlue Airways](#) Corp. said it was able to continue flying ahead of the ground stop, thanks to a backup process it developed after a prior FAA outage of the Notams system. A FedEx spokeswoman said the company didn't experience any significant disruptions to its operations overnight.

Billy Nolen, the FAA's acting administrator, held calls with a group of airline chief executives early Wednesday to discuss the problem, some of the industry officials said.

The large number of flights affected—during a key takeoff time for domestic trips—added to the challenge for airlines and airports to clear backlogged flights.

After flights resumed, airlines grappled with cascading effects of the early-morning pause, trying to prevent traffic jams and back-ups at major airports and to get planes and crews back into place. As of Wednesday evening, more than 1,300 flights to, from, or within the U.S. had been canceled, and more than 9,700 were delayed, according to FlightAware, a flight-data specialist.

It wasn't immediately clear what proportion of those flights were affected by the outage, with weather also a factor.

Delta, United and [American Airlines Group](#) Inc. said they would waive fare differences for some customers who wanted to change their flights.

Airlines' schedules were affected to different degrees. Southwest canceled more than 11% of flights and American canceled roughly 10% of flights across its system Wednesday, according to Anuvu, an aviation-data provider. United scrubbed roughly 5% of flights and Delta canceled about 3%, according to Anuvu figures. Southwest said it had proactively canceled flights during the ground stop, which pushed the departure of its first flights on the East Coast back by two to three hours, shortening its day. Delta said Wednesday afternoon that it was working to contain the impact and expected little residual impact, if any, on Thursday.

Shares of U.S. airlines generally closed higher Wednesday, [in line with gains](#) by major stock indexes.

Lawmakers from both parties raised concerns about the outage, including Sen. Maria Cantwell (D., Wash.), who chairs the Senate Commerce Committee. She said the committee plans to examine the breakdown and how to prevent future problems.

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HEADLINE	01/11 US, allies new sanctions Russia oil industry
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-allies-prepare-fresh-sanctions-on-russian-oil-industry-11673432088?mod=hp_lead_pos3
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The U.S. and its allies are preparing their next round of sanctions on Russia's oil industry, aiming to cap the sales prices of Russian exports of refined petroleum products in an expansion of novel penalties the West has imposed on the country's crude.</p> <p>In meetings across Europe this week, Treasury officials are discussing the details of the coming sanctions on Russian oil products, which are set to go into effect Feb. 5. The penalties will set two price limits on Russian refined products: one on high-value exports such as diesel and another on low-value ones such as fuel oil, according to people familiar with the plans.</p> <p>The new limits will follow moves last month by the U.S., European Union and their allies in the Group of Seven advanced democracies to cap the price of Russian crude exports at \$60 a barrel. Those sanctions have had a relatively muted impact on global prices, encouraging Western officials who want to pressure Russia's budget while minimizing volatility in critical global energy markets.</p> <p>But the penalties on refined products could have bigger economic consequences, particularly since they will take effect on the same day the EU will ban the import of Russian diesel and other refined products.</p>

Market watchers and some Western officials expect that Russia will have a harder time reorienting its exports of refined products, which could weigh on global prices.

Without access to the European market and facing Western sanctions on shipments elsewhere, Russian refining production could decline, reducing global supply.

“The price cap for oil: It was an unpleasant exercise but not so difficult. But for oil products, it is a much bigger problem,” said Tatiana Mitrova, a research fellow at Columbia University’s Center on Global Energy Policy.

Since [Russia invaded Ukraine](#), the U.S. and its allies have tried to degrade the Russian economy, which generates tax revenue that funds the military—while minimizing the collateral damage to their own economies. Russia’s lucrative oil industry has been the most challenging target of the West because of its importance to global energy markets, which are a factor in the [inflation that has plagued much of the world](#).

As with the price cap on Russian crude, the new penalties on petroleum products will apply to Western companies that finance, insure or ship seaborne cargoes of Russian products. Businesses based in the G-7 and Australia will face penalties if they facilitate the trade of Russian petroleum products unless those products are sold below the price caps.

An important reason the crude cap hasn’t upset oil markets so far is because of ships from the so-called [shadow fleet of tankers](#). These boats from outside Western jurisdictions carry a sizable portion of Russian crude exports to destinations in Asia that aren’t part of the sanctions—a dynamic acceptable to U.S. officials.

But a smaller, more specialized fleet of ships can carry petroleum products, meaning Russia would have fewer options to ship diesel and other products to any buyers in new markets in Latin America and Africa. India and China, the top importers of Russian crude, are major refiners themselves, so they are unlikely to buy the Russian petroleum products that normally go to Europe.

On top of the added logistical difficulties is Russia’s decree [banning the sale of](#) its oil and petroleum products to countries that put a cap on their sales price starting Feb. 1. The move could discourage market actors from using Western services to facilitate the trade of Russian oil, though how Russia would actually enforce the rule is unclear.

“I think there are a lot of reasons to assume that we are still in the very early days of something that could get much harder,” said Kevin Book, a managing director at Clearview Energy Partners.

Europe has relied on Russia for diesel fuel for decades, raising fears about the impact of the February penalties. For now, European fuel suppliers appear to have stocked up on diesel ahead of the Western restrictions. Philip Jones-Lux, an analyst at Geneva-based oil-data firm Sparta Commodities, said physical diesel prices in Europe currently aren’t high enough to encourage traders to send diesel from the U.S., Saudi Arabia and India to the region.

“What this is telling us is that, at the moment, there is no sign, on the pricing at least, that anyone is worried about European diesel supply come February,” he said.

Selecting the price for the two new caps is set to be a central topic in the talks between U.S. and European officials.

On crude, talks over the \$60 a barrel cap went down to the wire as U.S. officials lobbied their counterparts in Poland, Lithuania and Estonia to accept a higher price in hopes of minimizing disruptions to global markets. Officials in Poland and the Baltic states, echoing calls from Ukraine, sought a cap as low as \$30 per barrel to more deeply cut into the Kremlin’s revenue for the war.

	<p>A top economic policy official at the Treasury, Ben Harris, is traveling to Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland to discuss sanctions against Russia this week. U.S. officials are again aiming to set the cap on the price of Russian oil products low enough to try to eat into Moscow's profit but high enough to induce Russia to continue selling its diesel and other fuel.</p> <p>"This week is a really important one," said Oleg Ustenko, a top economic adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky who is involved in the talks. "It's a little bit more complicated with the products price cap; however, we already know how to deal with this issue. In this sense, it's going to be a little bit easier because we know the methodology."</p> <p>Mr. Ustenko is pushing for the West to lower the cap set for Russian crude from \$60 a barrel. Under the agreement reached in December, the EU committed to begin reviewing and potentially adjusting the crude price cap in mid-January, though officials don't expect to lower the crude price cap this month. The U.S. is seeking to keep the crude price cap set at \$60 a barrel, according to Western officials.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 DHS policy limits Border Patrol chases
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/11/dhs-slaps-new-limits-when-border-patrol-can-chase/
GIST	<p>The Department of Homeland Security announced a new vehicle-pursuit policy Wednesday that will severely limit when Border Patrol agents can pursue migrant smugglers, saying the cat-and-mouse game has become too dangerous for everyone involved.</p> <p>The policy, released by Customs and Border Protection's acting commissioner, bans agents from trying to box in a fleeing car or from using a pursuit immobilization technique in which a car is intentionally nudged to get it to stop.</p> <p>The policy also discourages pursuits when a suspect is fleeing above the speed limit, is overloaded with illegal immigrants or is headed toward a more populated area. All are frequent occurrences in Border Patrol chases.</p> <p>CBP said the new rules do not ban pursuits but are needed to reduce the danger and force agents to evaluate whether the suspected crime is serious enough to deserve a chase.</p> <p>"The safety of officers, agents and the public are paramount as we carry out our mission," said Troy Miller, the agency's acting head.</p> <p>The National Border Patrol Council, which represents agents, said it was still reviewing the changes but at first glance said it seems that the more recklessly a suspect drives, the better the chance that the person will force agents to stop pursuing.</p> <p>"There is a lot to be said for police backing off when they know who the criminal is and they can take the person into custody later, but in our job, the vast majority of vehicles used to smuggle are not registered to the person driving, so even if we run the license plate and find out who the registered owner is, we have to prove the owner was the driver or had knowledge," said Brandon Judd, the union's president. "Very difficult."</p> <p>Pursuits have become touchy issues for law enforcement departments nationwide, and policies limiting pursuits to certain crimes have proliferated. Some major city departments have adopted policies allowing chases only when a violent crime is involved.</p> <p>CBP said it studied some of those policies in writing its new version.</p> <p>The agency is grappling with the worst border chaos on record, including unprecedented levels of fentanyl, terrorism suspects and illegal border crossers.</p>

	<p>Migrant deaths have surged to record levels, according to CBP data and public reports, many of them in horrific vehicle crashes.</p> <p>The policy will take effect in May, after training. It replaces a more permissive policy released late in the Trump administration.</p> <p>CBP said agents and officers make the same kinds of risk decisions with any other use of force incident. Although chases don't always involve force, the risk is there.</p> <p>Supervisors have been instructed to keep a close rein on pursuits, and reporting requirements have been imposed so the agency can figure out what sorts of chases are still happening under the new policy.</p> <p>The policy applies to officers who man the ports of entry and to agents who guard the boundaries between the ports, though it's the agents who are likely to be the most constrained.</p> <p>Chases with speeds topping 100 miles per hour are regular occurrences. Smuggling drivers are increasingly reckless on the roads as they try to speed people and drugs north from the Mexican border.</p> <p>In one October case, agents in Arizona chased after a 2012 Nissan Murano whose driver refused to pull over. The SUV topped 100 miles an hour and the driver turned out the lights to black out the vehicle and make it tougher to keep tabs while veering over the double-yellow line into oncoming lanes.</p> <p>Agents stopped their pursuit, but a CBP helicopter kept an eye on the vehicle and directed agents to the location where it had pulled into a gas station. Agents rushed there and the vehicle took off again, nearly striking an agent on foot. The driver was eventually nabbed and told agents he was being paid in fentanyl pills to smuggle six migrants to Tucson.</p> <p>One common tactic for ending a pursuit has been to use a spike strip or vehicle immobilization device.</p> <p>Even with multiple tires shredded, some smugglers drive on the rims in hopes of escaping.</p> <p>In one September pursuit, agents in California spotted migrants getting into a Ford Edge. An agent spiked the tires, but the SUV barreled on before breaking down. The driver and three migrants made a run for it, leaving behind a child screaming in a car seat.</p> <p>Agents said in court documents that the driver later admitted that the child was her son. She said she was being paid \$3,000 per person she smuggled.</p> <p>The three migrants she was carrying said they sneaked into the U.S. in an area with no border fence and paid \$15,000 apiece to be smuggled.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Canada Girl Guides: no more 'Brownies'
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/11/girl-guides-canada-replace-brownies-embers-name-fi/
GIST	<p>Canadian moms bringing snacks to their daughters' Girl Guides meetings may want to steer clear of those fudgy baked chocolate squares.</p> <p>The Girl Guides of Canada announced Wednesday that their 7- to 8-year-old members will be called Embers instead of Brownies, deeming the previous name offensive to "racialized (Black, Indigenous and people of colour) girls and women."</p> <p>"Taking this step means we are creating more inclusive spaces where racialized girls in Canada can feel welcome and proud to belong in Girl Guides," said the announcement. "With this change, we hope even more girls will see Guiding as a space where they can just be themselves."</p>

The organization said in November that it was undertaking a national search to replace Brownies “after hearing from current and former members that the previous name caused harm and was a barrier to belonging for racialized girls and women.”

The Board of Directors “emphatically agreed this was the right action to take to reduce harm to racialized girls and stand by our commitment to inclusion, equity and anti-racism,” according to the FAQ.

“This wasn’t just about a name or its origin,” said Girl Guides CEO Jill Zelmanovits. “This was about the fact that girls experienced racism and felt that they weren’t welcome in Girl Guides.”

On social media, however, the name change sparked blowback from those accusing the Girl Guides of going overboard on the wokeness front.

Comments included “another laughingly ridiculous action by the perpetually offended,” “the ‘cancel culture’ cult is real,” and “Am I still allowed to buy/bake/eat gooey chocolatey unleavened pan baked bars or is that not cool anymore?”

One commenter snarked: “I’m actually surprised that they aren’t changing the name ‘Girl’ from guides. It is probably next.”

CTV News Ottawa posted an online poll Wednesday showing that 70% disagreed with the decision to rename the Brownies, with 1,123 votes cast.

Others pointed out that the term “Brownie,” also used by the Girls Scouts of the USA for seven- to nine-year-olds, was taken from British folklore, which describes brownies as helpful elf-like creatures who perform household chores. (This is also the origin of Brownie the Elf, the mascot of the NFL’s Cleveland Browns.)

Lord Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of scouting, “was familiar with the folk tales about helpful, magical ‘little people’ called Brownies,” according to “Brownie History” by the Girl Scouts of Middle Tennessee.

“They did good deeds in secret, and Baden-Powell thought that ‘Brownies’ would be a fitting name for young girls who could learn to help their families and communities,” said the post.

A few wags predicted that Embers wouldn’t last. “I’m offended. Embers burn things down,” one commenter said.

They noted that embers are also associated with carbon emissions. “Bit of an odd choice considering we are in a climate crisis,” said another.

One commenter concluded: “I give it 5 days before the wokies find a reason that ‘embers’ is racist.”

Girl Guides plans to have the new name fully phased in by Sept. 1. The organization’s other branches are Sparks (ages 5-6), Guides (ages 9-11), Pathfinders (ages 12-14), and Rangers (ages 15-17).

Ms. Zelmanovits said that families have since signed up for the first time “because changing this name means Girl Guides is more inclusive for their daughters.”

“By taking action and changing the name to Embers, Girl Guides is living our promise to ‘take action for a better world’ and we are showing girls that what they say matters,” she said.

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HEADLINE	01/11 SKorea aggressive schedule military drills
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/11/south-korea-announces-aggressive-schedule-drills-m/

SEOUL — In 2022, North Korea upped the stakes in the standoff on the Korean Peninsula with its largest number of missile tests ever. In 2023, South Korea is returning fire as it expands exercises with the United States.

The schedule of drills released by South Korea's defense ministry Wednesday far outpaces those of recent years in both scope and sophistication, at a time when the war of nerves on the peninsula has largely devolved into a "missile test vs. joint exercise" competition.

But with Seoul's new schedule come new risks.

On Dec. 26, the North found a weak point in the South's defenses: Five drones entered southern skies. South Korea's military was deeply embarrassed by its failures to down any. President Yoon Suk Yeol responded forcefully.

In an "armistice-be-damned" approach, Mr. Yoon ordered his forces to send two or three drones over the dividing Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in North Korea for every drone Pyongyang sends to the south. Earlier this month, Mr. Yoon raised the possibility of U.S. forces drilling with nuclear arms in South Korea, something President Biden appeared to deny.

Following that communication snafu, Seoul on Wednesday announced its military schedule for 2023, the Yonhap News Agency reported. It looks to be a busy year. The increased tempo includes a deputy defense minister-level tabletop exercise, set for Washington in February, that will war game how the two allies would respond to North Korea's use of a nuclear weapon.

"Freedom Shield" joint field drills set for this spring will take place uninterrupted over 11 days — reportedly, the longest ever. The drills, which rotate U.S. assets into the peninsula to beef up the approximately 28,000-strong permanent U.S. troop deployment, have long been a source of sharp contention with Pyongyang.

The regime of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, influenced by Soviet and Russian doctrine, angrily charges that the joint maneuvers — which include counterattack as well as defensive segments — are a rehearsal for an invasion. Then-President Trump suspended the joint training exercises while pursuing his ultimately unproductive personal diplomacy with Mr. Kim in 2018 and 2019.

Even after the collapse of the Trump-Kim rapprochement in 2019, many exercises remained on hold amid the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only after the conservative Mr. Yoon took power in Seoul in May was the pace of exercises fully restored.

In addition to Freedom Shield, Seoul and Washington have laid out plans to conduct 20 field exercises in the first half of the year alone. Notably, "Double Dragon" amphibious drills will be upgraded from brigade to division strength.

Seoul also plans tests this year of solid-fuel space-launch vehicles, technology that could also apply to ballistic missiles. Solid-fuel projectiles are less vulnerable than liquid-propellant missiles: They don't need to be erected and fueled prior to launch.

Seoul also plans to send its first native spy satellite aloft this year, with the aim of having five in orbit by the middle of the decade, a move also likely to provoke Pyongyang. NATO and U.S. commercial satellites have been critical in delivering battlefield intelligence to Ukraine in its war with Russia, enabling the use of network-centric, high-precision weapons.

In yet another first, a joint U.S.-South Korea space drill will also take place this year. Last month, the U.S. Space Force created a new command within the U.S. Forces Korea structure. South Korea's military also plans to acquire new anti-drone defensive systems.

	<p>North Korea's heavy slate of ballistic and cruise missile tests last year has many Pyongyang watchers fearing that a new nuclear weapons test could be in the works, possibly an atmospheric detonation of a small-yield, "tactical" device. It would be the first nuclear test for the Kim regime since 2017.</p> <p>Not everyone is comfortable with Mr. Yoon's more aggressive schedule.</p> <p>"There is concern among some ... who feel that Yoon wants to come out strong to make up for his low [popularity] ratings," said Go Myong-hyun, an analyst at Seoul's Asian Institute.</p> <p>However, Mr. Go himself considers the joint drills — including a U.S. nuclear component — to be a necessary response to North Korea.</p> <p>Seoul's ramped-up activities in 2023 "are required to reassure the public when it comes to uncertainty about the U.S. commitment to the defense of South Korea," Mr. Go said. "Many in the South may not agree, but not holding exercises also causes uncertainty and anxiety."</p> <p>David Park, a retired U.S. Army major who served in Korea, said Mr. Yoon and Gen. Kim Seung-kyum, chairman of the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff, are taking the right approach, despite the menacing rhetoric out of North Korea.</p> <p>Gen. Kim, Mr. Park said, "is not a loose cannon."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 LAPD cops tased suspect to death?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/11/black-lives-matter-co-founder-cousin-killed-los-angeles-police
GIST	<p>A cousin of Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors was killed by Los Angeles police after he got in a traffic accident and officers who showed up repeatedly Tased and restrained him in the middle of the street, according to body-camera footage and his family's account.</p> <p>Footage from the 3 January encounter released on Wednesday showed that Keenan Anderson, a 31-year-old high school teacher and father, was begging for help as multiple officers held him down, and at one point said, "They're trying to George Floyd me." One officer had his elbow on Anderson's neck while he was lying down before another Tased him for roughly 30 seconds straight before pausing and Tasing him again for five more seconds.</p> <p>"My cousin was asking for help, and he didn't receive it. He was killed," Cullors told the Guardian after watching LAPD's footage. "Nobody deserves to die in fear, panicking and scared for their life. My cousin was scared for his life. He spent the last 10 years witnessing a movement challenging the killing of Black people. He knew what was at stake and he was trying to protect himself. Nobody was willing to protect him."</p> <p>An officer who first arrived to the car collision at around 3.30pm at Venice and Lincoln boulevards found Anderson in the middle of the road, saying, "Please help me." The officer told him to go on the sidewalk, and issued commands, saying, "Get up against the wall." Anderson held his hands up, responding, "I didn't mean to. I'm sorry." Anderson complied with the officer's commands and sat down on the sidewalk. After a few minutes, he appeared to be concerned with the officer's behavior, saying, "I want people to see me," and "You're putting a thing on me."</p> <p>Eventually, Anderson started to flee, at which point the officer chased him on his motorcycle, shouting, "Get down to the ground, now," and "Turn over on your stomach." Anderson repeatedly responded, "Please help me," and "They're trying to kill me," as multiple officers arrived and held him down. One of them placed his elbow and bodyweight on Anderson's neck while he was laying with his back on the ground. At this point, the officer standing above him shouted, "Turn over or I'm going to Tase you."</p>

During the Tasing, Anderson repeatedly said, “Help me,” as the officer told him to stop resisting. Paramedics later arrived at the scene and took him to a hospital where, according to LAPD, he went into cardiac arrest four and a half hours later and died.

‘His death could’ve been prevented’

Cullors and other advocates have questioned why it was necessary for armed police to show up to a collision.

“It was a traffic accident. Instead of treating him like a potential criminal, police should have called the ambulance,” said Cullors. “If there was a policy in which traffic stops were met with unarmed professionals who come to the scene to help with whatever situation has happened, that would have prevented my cousin’s death. And that would have prevented so many other deaths.”

She added, “These types of killings and this type of force will not be interrupted unless we have courageous elected officials come forward and challenge not just the police, but also the policies.”

National data has shown that roughly 10% of killings by police each year [start with a traffic encounter](#), and that one in three people killed were [fleeing](#) before lethal force was used. Last year was the deadliest year for police violence since experts started tracking killings nationwide in 2013, according to a [recent analysis](#). LAPD has also fatally shot two people so far this year, and in 2020 [killed Daniel Hernandez after he was in a car accident](#).

While some law enforcement officials and reform proponents have argued that Tasers are a “less lethal” weapon and an important tool to reduce police violence, experts and racial justice advocates have increasingly [raised concerns about the mass deployment of stun guns](#). There is growing evidence of the potentially fatal consequences of Taser use, with a Reuters [investigation](#) finding more than 1,000 cases between 2000 and 2018 where people died after they were Tased.

Studies have also raised questions about the claim that Tasers provide a useful alternative to firearms, with research in [San Francisco](#) and [Chicago](#) suggesting that the widespread adoption of stun guns did not reduce fatalities, but that police were using Tasers in cases when they previously would have used no weapon. There have also been more than a dozen shootings by police in which the officers [claimed they accidentally](#) used their gun instead of their Taser, including the deaths of Oscar Grant and Daunte Wright.

Dr Melina Abdullah, co-founder of Black Lives Matter Los Angeles, who went with Cullors to watch the body-camera footage, said on Wednesday: “It’s a reminder that when we say ‘Black lives matter,’ we mean our own Black lives, too. We’re not fighting for some cause, we’re fighting for our own lives and for our people.”

LAPD chief Michel Moore said in a news [conference](#) that Anderson was behaving “erratic” and suffered a “medical emergency” and claimed that a preliminary blood test revealed cannabis and cocaine in his system. A formal cause of death, however, has not been determined, and advocates have criticized the department for releasing that information and suggesting drug use was related to his death.

“Keenan’s murder is absolutely horrific. LAPD is not calling it a ‘killing,’ but calling it an ‘in-custody death.’ But Keenan was Tased to death. We know LAPD caused Keenan’s death,” Abdullah said. “We know that a minor traffic accident shouldn’t result in the death of anyone, let alone the death of this Black man, who was clearly unarmed and wasn’t doing anything wrong.”

Moore said the Taser was “activated” against Anderson ten times, but that not all deployments were “effective”, adding, “It’s unclear what role the physical struggle with the officers and the use of the Taser played in his unfortunate death.” He claimed Anderson was in an “altered mental state” and that as the investigation continues, “I will play close attention to the use of the Taser.”

Under LAPD policy, he [said](#), “There is no pre-set limit on the number of times a Taser can be used in a particular situation, however, officers should generally avoid repeated or simultaneous activations to avoid potential injury.”

Cullors said she didn’t know his mental state, but that he appeared to be “terrified of police” and in crisis after getting in a crash.

Mayor Karen Bass called the footage of Anderson and the two fatal shootings this month “deeply disturbing” in a statement, adding, “We must reduce the use of force overall, and I have absolutely no tolerance for excessive force ... When there is no immediate risk to others, law enforcement must not be the first responder when someone is experiencing a mental health crisis.”

‘A committed educator’

Anderson, who leaves behind a young child, was working as an English teacher at the Digital Pioneers Academy, a majority-Black school in Washington DC, and was visiting LA, said Cullors. He previously worked at several other schools, including a charter school in Watts in LA.

Cullors said she and Anderson are part of a large family that migrated from Louisiana “to get away from racism, to get away from the terrorizing of white supremacists and the structures that impact our communities”.

Cullors, a longtime organizer who has talked about her [brother’s abuse in LA jail](#), is one of three women credited with founding the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted of murdering Trayvon Martin in Florida.

“I think about the migration of Black people and what we do to try to keep our families safe, and coming to [California](#) and Los Angeles as this ‘western haven.’ Given the impact law enforcement has had on so many of my family members and now the killing of my cousin, it’s painful, because he was so committed to family.”

Cullors continued: “He was so committed to his students. He was so present for them and was an educator who believed in education.” She recalled how Anderson at a young age was driven to “be a better human being, to make a difference and to impact people’s lives”.

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HEADLINE	01/12 HRW: cracks in authoritarian regimes
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/jan/12/cracks-in-authoritarian-regimes-offer-hope-in-a-dark-year-says-human-rights-watch
GIST	<p>Cracks in the armour of authoritarian states in the past year should give the world hope that brutal regimes can be called to account, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW) in its annual analysis of the state of human rights globally.</p> <p>The world report 2023 from HRW chronicles the litany of human rights crises that affected millions of people in the past 12 months, most dramatically in Afghanistan, where the Taliban have “walked back women’s rights continuously since they took over” and in China, where the mass detention of an estimated one million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, stands out for its “gravity, scale and cruelty”.</p> <p>But fault lines have emerged in seemingly impenetrable countries, the acting executive director of HRW, Tirana Hassan, said. Hassan cited street protests in Chinese cities against strict “zero Covid” lockdown measures and in Iran, where the death of Mahsa Amini, 22, in the custody of police for not wearing her hijab properly unleashed the biggest street protests in the country in years.</p> <p>“What 2022 has shown us is there are cracks in the authoritarian armour,” said Hassan. “There has been a rising up of the people who have expressed their commitment, their desire and their demand to have human rights realised.” But for change to happen, states around the world need to support them, she said.</p>

“We cannot take for granted, just because there’s a tension right now and people are on the streets in Iran, for example, that this will last into 2023,” said Hassan.

HRW also praised the international response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to protect refugees, investigate crimes and impose sanctions, as a positive note in a year of dramatic roll-backs in human rights across the world.

As the organisation launched its [global assessment of 2022](#), Hassan said that, for the first time in decades, nations have come together to ensure “justice and accountability” for war crimes and to protect refugees.

“We’ve seen what is possible when the international community comes together to prioritise the safety and protection of people fleeing war,” Hassan said. Within weeks of the invasion, the international community had established criminal investigations, evidence-gathering mechanisms and mobilised the international court, she said. “We’ve seen what is possible when it mobilises to ensure there’s justice and accountability for the most egregious crimes committed, including war crimes. The bar has moved for the first time in decades and it hasn’t gone down, it’s gone up.”

Hassan suggested that governments should reflect on the potential outcome had they had acted earlier, at the onset of the war in eastern Ukraine, in 2014, or when Russian aircraft bombed civilian areas [in Syria in 2016](#). “What would have happened if the international community had held Putin to account for these other crimes or even held Russia to account for the initial invasion into Ukraine?” she asked.

“If autocrats and human rights abusers are not held to account, it emboldens them,” said Hassan, and she challenged governments to provide a similar response to human rights violations outside Europe.

“We could expect the same type of response for serious violations in Israel and Palestine, in Afghanistan and across the world. This is about how seriously the world takes its obligations. It is replicable. Twenty-two provides the opportunity for states to demonstrate that this is not just about what happened in Europe.”

The [armed conflict in Ethiopia](#), she said, had received only a “tiny fraction” of the global attention focused on Ukraine, despite two years of atrocities, including a number of massacres by warring parties.

“We cannot underestimate the ripple effect of giving a free pass to some of the world’s most serious crimes,” said Hassan, and reflected that 2022 was a “very challenging year” for women’s rights – particularly in Afghanistan, which provides the “starkest picture of what the total erosion of women’s rights looks like”.

“In Afghanistan, our job is to stay committed to human rights, to fortify them any way we can and to make sure that the Taliban are under pressure to reverse their thinking. We often fall into line of thinking the Taliban are untouchable. They are not.

“What I would say, is in the face of this incredibly dark time, we’ve seen some exceptional counter-movements, to protect women’s rights around the world.”

In a year where the [US supreme court struck down 50 years of federal protection](#) for abortion rights, Latin America has seen a so-called [“green wave” of women-led abortion rights expansion](#), including in Mexico, Argentina and Colombia, which provides a “roadmap” for other countries, Hassan said.

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HEADLINE	01/12 West losing patience with Libya elite
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/12/west-losing-patience-with-libyan-elite-over-aborted-elections

Western leaders are losing patience with an entrenched Libyan political elite that has collectively failed to agree on the basis of elections for more than a year but has boosted politicians' salaries by more than 40%, according to official figures.

Special envoys from the US, France, Germany, Italy and the UK are due to meet in Washington on 13 January to discuss their next steps after two rival Libyan factions last week failed to reach a final agreement in Cairo on the constitutional basis for national elections.

The presidential and parliamentary elections were aborted in December 2021. A previous French-led effort to stage elections, in 2018, had also foundered. A series of unelected and competing interim governments have governed Libya for nearly a decade.

Elections planned for 2022 were cancelled due to disputes over the qualifications of candidates to stand, which masked a deeper reluctance by politicians in both the east and west of the country to risk a democratic winner-takes-all process that might see them lose access to state patronage and power.

One exasperated western diplomat said: "They are some making sincere efforts at mediation, but the abiding character of too many Libyan politicians on both sides of the divide is [to] pay lip service to the necessity of elections and then do everything possible to throttle them so they can continue lining their pockets. We may have to stop hoping we can persuade these people to agree to elections and instead find a way to work around them."

The meeting on 13 January of special envoys convened by the US envoy, Richard Norland, will look at how to stage elections and whether to urge the [new UN special envoy Abdoulaye Bathily](#) to set a deadline for establishing a national Libyan body to agree on elections.

The growth of the Libyan economy is projected to be 17.9% this year, the highest in [Africa](#), but despite this some estimates show that nearly a third of Libyans, especially in the south, live at, or below, the poverty line.

Libya's political leaders have gone round in circles with competing proposals for the constitutional basis of the elections. Months of talks in Cairo between Libya's House of Representatives speaker, Aguila Saleh, from the east of the country, and the head of the high council of state, Khaled al-Meshri, representing the western area, made some progress, but did not resolve whether dual nationals could stand for the presidency, or for how long candidates would have to permanently resign from any existing position if they wished to stand.

Behind these disputes are efforts from either side to bar controversial candidates from standing. Norland has claimed there is no impediment to Meshri and Saleh setting an election date, but the two men have refused to do so.

The reputation of the political class has hardly been enhanced by Central Bank of Libya figures published last week showing total state spending rose last year to 127.9bn Libyan dinars, an increase of 42bn dinars or about \$9bn in 2021.

Figures on how the state is spending money have been unclear for years, with a full UN-commissioned audit of the CBL accounts never published.

Public salaries, including those for politicians, rose 42% to 47bn dinars for 2022, compared with 33bn dinars the previous year. This was the single biggest expenditure item. Fuel subsidies racked up 20bn dinars, and development and projects 17.5bn dinars. The Libyan National Oil Corporation was given 34bn dinars – about \$6bn.

Oil remains the chief source of state revenue, worth 134bn dinars (\$29bn).

The House of Representatives, last elected in 2016, was paid 144m dinars or \$30m. The high council of state, the remnants of an oversight parliament elected in 2012 under the control of the west and led by Meshri, received 49m dinars, or \$10m.

The interim Tripoli-based government, also supported by Turkey and led by the [interim prime minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah](#), has also paid out billions in benefits.

Critics say even allowing for the devaluation of the Libyan dinar, the scale of the salaries and disbursements suggest that an unaccountable political class is eager to avoid the verdict of the ballot box. Tim Eaton, a Libya expert at Chatham House, said: “These central bank figures are still opaque, but clearly spending on salaries is staggeringly high. Given the amount of money that is supposedly being spent on public services, ordinary people in Libya are simply not receiving an adequate level of service.”

The experienced former UN envoy in Libya, Stephanie Williams, recently said: “A transactional ruling class, some of whose network can be traced back to the days of the former regime, uses Libya’s state and sovereign institutions as cash cows in what could be described as a ‘redistributive kleptocracy’, bringing into their circles on a regular basis just enough of their compatriots to sustain the system.” She said some Libyan politicians simply did not see the need for elections.

Popular frustration with the lack of elections exists. In a statement Aref Nayed, chairman of the Ihya Libya movement, said: “There is nothing to prevent elections except for a corrupt political junta that is fighting each other over everything, but it is united in confiscating the right of the Libyan people to determine their own destiny and share their wealth.”

Zahra Langhi, a women’s rights activist, said “political elites including [the] governor and central bank board have long benefited from a culture of impunity. Libya is witnessing a stalemate in the political track as well as division and capture of state institutions that defrauds the Libyan people of their right to elect their representatives”.

The debate among western diplomats is about whether to set a hard deadline for Libya’s political institutions to reach agreement on the basis of elections, and if that deadline is not met, whether to launch a new process.

Libyan political institutions have long lost legitimacy with the House of Representatives, which was elected in June 2014 on a turnout of less than 20%. Saleh, the speaker, was elected with little more than 1,000 votes. The high council of state, broadly the upper house and based in the west with a strong Muslim Brotherhood constituency, was elected in 2016.

In February 2021, Dbeibah was elected head of the interim government by a 75-strong UN appointed body and was charged solely with preparing for the elections, but before the election date was aborted he had reneged on a pledge not to stand in the elections, contributing to the impasse that led to the elections being called off.

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HEADLINE	01/11 Another day of chaos at airports
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/jan/11/airline-travel-chaos-passengers-laguardia-airport
GIST	<p>After an \$8bn makeover, New York’s new LaGuardia airport complex is finally an airport the city can be proud of. Unfortunately the same can not be said for the industry it serves.</p> <p>For the second time in almost two weeks, thousands of flights were canceled across the US on Wednesday – this time because of what appears to be a snafu with an antiquated computer system. Passengers have had enough.</p>

“It’s been rough this last couple of years,” said Deb Alexis, who had traveled to New York from Orlando. “The flight was great, but now there’s stress because the bags haven’t come. Seems like there’s a lot of confusion and delays nowadays.”

Asked if airline travel is becoming altogether too much trouble, Danny Dividu, on his way to Georgia when his Southwest plane was canceled, said simply: “Hell yes. Now I’ve got to go back upstairs to check in again. I usually go Greyhound. Best way to go. I hate flying. It’s too much hassle, always has been.”

Another day, another crisis at US airports.

It might have been the cascading weather-related disruptions the US experienced over the holidays, or computer issues, scheduling, pilot or crew shortages but the outcome was familiar: customers left in a helpless state of air travel limbo.

Whatever the precise cause of Wednesday’s issues, they are part of a wider set of problems for travelers, airlines and the FAA, said Robert Mann, a former airline executive who now runs the consulting firm RW Mann & Company.

“The FAA runs on hardware and software that is, in many cases, decades old,” he said. “And it’s a multi-year effort to build and install them.”

Even a small, regional failure can have knock-on effects for the entire network, he said, but this “seems to be a system failure” and travelers could expect more issues unless something is done.

The FAA estimates that delayed and canceled flights cost the US economy \$33bn in 2019. “Everyone – the department of transportation, the general accounting office, Congress – agree that there is a significant cost to this but nobody does anything about it,” Mann said.

Congress is set to debate the funding of the FAA this year and the hearings are expected to be heated. The FAA is currently without a leader and has been since last March.

Biden has nominated Phillip Washington, currently the chief executive of Denver international airport, to the position. But his nomination has been clouded by criticism of his lack of experience in the aviation industry and ties to a corruption scandal.

With Republicans now in charge of the House, Biden’s nomination looks more uncertain and the latest mess will expose the transport secretary, Pete Buttigieg, to more criticism following the chaos at US airports over the holidays.

After the flight restrictions were lifted, Buttigieg said his department was not ruling out the possibility that nefarious activity was to blame for the computer system outage.

“We’re not prepared to rule that out,” Buttigieg said in an interview on MSNBC. “There is no direct indication of any kind of external or nefarious activity, but we are not yet prepared to rule that out,” Buttigieg said.

After the incident, Ted Cruz, the top Republican on the Senate committee on commerce, science and transportation, called for congressional reforms to the FAA.

“The flying public deserves safety in the sky,” the Texas senator said in a statement. “The administration needs to explain to Congress what happened, and Congress should enact reforms in this year’s FAA reauthorization legislation.”

Wednesday’s incident, Cruz added, “highlights why the public needs a competent, proven leader with substantive aviation experience leading the FAA”.

	<p>By mid-morning, the FAA issued its fifth bulletin. “Normal air traffic operations are resuming gradually across the United States following an overnight outage,” the agency said in a statement.</p> <p>By then, it was too late for many passengers. Jordan Cousins, 25, on his way to Nashville from New York’s LaGuardia, said his Southwest flight had been delayed twice and then canceled entirely.</p> <p>“It’s this and then it’s that. You never know. You may have a smooth flight or there may be a problem. It may be at the counter, with the plane, or something,” he said. “Plans never go as planned.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/12 Day 323 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/12/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-323-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, mocked Russian claims to have taken over parts of the eastern city of Soledar, and said that fighting is ongoing. “The terrorist state and its propagandists are trying to pretend” to have achieved some successes in Soledar, Zelenskiy said in his Wednesday evening address, “but the fighting continues”. Ukraine’s military also denied that Russian forces have encircled and captured Soledar after claims by the head of the Wagner mercenary group that the mining town had fallen. • Russia appointed Valery Gerasimov, chief of the general staff, as its overall commander for the war in Ukraine, in the latest of several major shake-ups of Moscow’s military leadership. Russia’s defence ministry said the changes were designed to “improve the quality ... and effectiveness of the management of Russian forces” in a statement on Wednesday. Gerasimov has faced sharp criticism from Russia’s hawkish military bloggers for multiple setbacks on the battlefield. • The British government is planning to provide tanks to Ukraine to help the country defend itself, according to a spokesperson for Number 10. Speaking to reporters on Wednesday the spokesperson said that prime minister Rishi Sunak, has asked defence secretary, Ben Wallace, to “work with partners” and to provide further support to Ukraine “including the provision of tanks”. “It’s clear that battle tanks could provide a game-changing capability to the Ukrainians,” he said. “The prime minister told President Zelenskiy last week the UK will provide whatever we can.” • Poland plans to send 10 German-made Leopard tanks to Ukraine as part of an international coalition, the Polish president said on a visit to Lviv on Wednesday. The transfer would require permission from Germany, which Kyiv has been pressing separately to supply Leopard 2s, perhaps suggesting a softening of Germany’s stance on the transfer of main battle tanks after recent contacts between Warsaw and Berlin. However, a German government spokesperson said it was not aware of any requests from allies to send the tanks to Ukraine. • The European Union is “prepared for a long war” in Ukraine and will support Kyiv against Russia’s aggression for “as long as it takes”, said Sweden’s foreign minister Tobias Billström, whose country holds the EU’s presidency. He also said the EU would continue working on more sanctions against Moscow over the invasion of Ukraine. • Zelenskiy urged Nato to do more than just promise Ukraine its open doors, and said Kyiv needs “powerful steps” as it tries to join the military alliance. “For today, just support for Ukraine from colleagues in Nato and support in the form of rhetoric about open doors is not enough for Ukraine. Namely, not enough to motivate our state ... our soldiers,” Zelenskiy said in Lviv after talks with the presidents of Lithuania and Poland. “We need steps forward ... we are looking forward to powerful steps, we are counting on something more than just open doors.” • The Russian president said the situation in Ukrainian regions that Moscow illegally annexed was “difficult in places”. Vladimir Putin, speaking at a televised meeting with officials, also said Russia had all the resources it needed to improve life in the four Ukrainian regions that Moscow unilaterally claimed to have annexed in September. • Ukraine must “be ready” at its border with Russian ally Belarus even though it sees only “powerful statements” coming from its neighbour, Zelenskiy said on Wednesday. Kyiv has

	<p>warned that Russia may try to use Belarus to launch a new ground invasion of Ukraine from the north.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nato and the EU are launching a taskforce to bolster the protection of critical infrastructure in response to last year’s attack on the Nord Stream gas pipelines and Russia’s “weaponising of energy”, leaders said on Wednesday. The European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said the taskforce would initially come up with proposals on transport, energy, digital and space infrastructure. • A Russian conscript has been sentenced to five-and-a-half years in prison after getting into an altercation with his superiors over poor training conditions, in the first known ruling against a soldier who criticised the Kremlin’s unpopular mobilisation. In a video filmed on 13 November, draftee Alexander Leshkov is seen shouting profanities and shoving Lt Col Denis Mazanov at a training ground outside Moscow. Leshkov is heard telling his commander: “You are sabotaging the commander-in-chief’s direct orders [to supply and train mobilised soldiers],” adding: “You should be arrested.” • Wagner claimed its forces found the body of one of two British voluntary aid workers reported missing in eastern Ukraine. It did not give the name of the dead man but said documents belonging to both Britons had been found on his body. A photo posted alongside the statement appeared to show passports bearing the names of Andrew Bagshaw and Christopher Parry, the two missing workers. Ukrainian police said on Monday they were looking for the pair who went missing. A spokesperson for Britain’s Foreign Office added: “We are supporting the families of two British men who have gone missing in Ukraine.”
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HEADLINE	01/11 Civilian war casualties explosive weapons
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/jan/11/ukraine-war-pushes-civilian-casualties-from-explosive-weapons-to-four-year-high
GIST	<p>Civilian casualties from the use of explosive weapons soared by 83% last year because of the war in Ukraine, according to a monitoring organisation that counts the number of deaths caused by conflict and war.</p> <p>Action on Armed Violence (AOVA) said the total number reported killed and injured in 2022 was 20,776, the highest level since 2018, with 10,381 casualties in Ukraine alone, based on reports from English language media.</p> <p>Its figure, though, is almost certainly a significant underestimate, partly because media reports only capture the most serious incidents. The latest UN figures report 17,994 civilian casualties in Ukraine, 6,919 killed and 11,075 injured.</p> <p>Even the UN figure is considered low, as it has not been possible to record casualty numbers from places where some of the most serious fighting has taken place, most notably the city of Mariupol, destroyed in a Russian siege last spring, but also in other areas of intense fighting including Izium and Sievierodonetsk.</p> <p>But the monitoring group’s methodology has been consistently applied for over a decade and so provides a snapshot of the level of global conflict and the seriousness of its impact on non combatants caught up in war.</p> <p>Explosive weapon use in towns and cities accounted for 69% of incidents recorded in 2022, but caused 94% of all reported civilian casualties, with the figure even higher in Ukraine partly because of Russia’s tactics of targeting urban areas.</p> <p>“Russian explosive attacks,” said Iain Overton, executive director of AOAV, were “specifically aimed at the Ukrainian civilian population” – and when aimed at towns and cities, he added “over 98% of those killed or injured were reported to be civilians”.</p>

	<p>Reflecting such data, last November, 80 countries led by the US, UK and France signed a declaration in Dublin pledging to refrain from urban bombing, the first time countries have agreed to curb the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Russia and Ukraine, however, did not sign.</p> <p>The start of the major war in Europe dramatically reversed a three-year period in which reported civilian casualties from explosive violence were under 20,000 a year. A year before, in 2021, the figure was 11,343.</p> <p>Reported casualties in Ukraine alone were eight times more than the next most affected country, Afghanistan, which was followed by Syria, Somalia and Ethiopia, with state based violence from Russia alone causing 45% of civilian casualties.</p> <p>However, the overall total of civilian casualties is still lower than the rest of the 2010s when fighting in Syria and Afghanistan was more intense. Between 2013 and 2017, the number of civilians killed and wounded ran at more than 30,000 a year.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 More Biden's classified documents found
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/us/politics/biden-classified-documents.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden's aides have found a new batch of classified documents at a second location associated with Mr. Biden, a person familiar with the situation said on Wednesday. It was the second such disclosure in three days, and it was sure to intensify Republican attacks.</p> <p>Republicans reveled in the new disclosures, accusing Mr. Biden of hypocrisy in calling former President Donald J. Trump irresponsible for hoarding sensitive documents at his private club and residence in Florida. This week, the new Republican chairman of the House oversight committee issued a far-ranging request to the National Archives and Records Administration, which is supposed to receive all highly sensitive materials after an administration leaves office, for documents and correspondence.</p> <p>It is not clear where or when the records were recovered. But Mr. Biden's aides have scoured various places since November, when his lawyers discovered a handful of classified files, including briefing materials on foreign countries, as they closed a think tank office in Washington. The Justice Department is reviewing the discovery to determine how to proceed.</p> <p>A White House spokesman and a member of Mr. Biden's legal team did not immediately respond to requests for comment. A spokesman for the Justice Department declined to comment.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Mr. Biden told reporters in Mexico City that he was "surprised" to learn in the fall that his lawyers found classified government documents in his former office at the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement.</p> <p>He said his staff had fully cooperated with the National Archives and the Justice Department.</p> <p>A day later, NBC News reported that another cache had been found at a different, undisclosed location.</p> <p>Under government regulations, access to classified documents is limited to people who are currently authorized to see them and the materials must be stored in special security containers to limit the risk of exposing sensitive information. The Presidential Records Act says official documents in the White House — classified and unclassified alike — should be turned over to the National Archives when an administration departs.</p> <p>After Mr. Trump left office, officials with the archives identified sensitive documents that had not been recovered, prompting numerous appeals for their return. The matter was eventually referred to the Justice Department, which conducted a court-approved search of Mr. Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate and turned up classified materials, including some bearing the most restrictive top secret markings.</p>

By contrast, the first set of documents found by Mr. Biden's lawyers was voluntarily returned to the archives in November, and had not been logged as missing. It is not clear if the archives had flagged the new materials.

A spokesman for the archives declined to comment.

The discovery of the second batch raises new questions about the handling of sensitive documents by a Biden team that has prided itself for adhering to norms and rules flouted by his predecessor.

But the circumstances of the two cases appear strikingly different. Unlike Mr. Trump, who resisted returning the records stored at Mar-a-Lago and failed to fully comply with a subpoena, Mr. Biden's team appears to have acted swiftly and in accordance with the law, immediately summoning officials with the National Archives to retrieve the files. The archives then alerted the Justice Department, according to the White House.

"After I was briefed about the discovery, I was surprised to learn that there are any government records that were taken to that office," Mr. Biden said in Mexico.

"But I don't know what's in the documents," he added.

On Wednesday, the White House press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, refused to address the issue, saying it would be inappropriate to comment on a matter under review by the Justice Department.

She also declined to provide details of searches undertaken by Mr. Biden's legal team after the first batch of files was discovered and did not respond when asked about the possibility that other sensitive materials dating to the Obama era were stored at other Biden-related locations.

"I'm not going to go beyond what the president shared yesterday," she said. "I'm not going to go beyond what my colleagues at the White House counsel shared with all of you as well."

Attorney General Merrick B. Garland, whose time in office has been largely defined by two criminal investigations involving Mr. Trump, assigned the preliminary phase of the Biden inquiry to John R. Lausch Jr., the U.S. attorney in Chicago, a Trump appointee.

But the inevitable comparison of the Trump documents case with the Biden matter has put new pressure on Mr. Garland to appoint a special counsel to investigate Mr. Biden's handling of government files. In November, days after Mr. Trump announced his third bid for the presidency, Mr. Garland assigned a special counsel, Jack Smith, to oversee the investigation into Mr. Trump's role in the Jan. 6 attack, and the inquiry into whether he illegally kept classified materials at Mar-a-Lago.

Mr. Lausch's review is aimed at helping Mr. Garland decide whether to appoint a special counsel, which appears increasingly likely, according to people familiar with the situation.

Mr. Garland has been briefed on the inquiry, according to a person familiar with the situation, though it is unclear if he has made a decision.

If the legal implications of this week's revelations remain unclear, the political implications are more obvious.

Republicans, eager to move on from the rancor of their recent House leadership fight, hope to spin the Biden matter into an attack that sustains a protracted congressional investigation that damages Mr. Biden and blunts the effects of Mr. Trump's troubles on the party.

	<p>On Tuesday, Representative James Comer, Republican of Kentucky, the chairman of the House oversight committee, asked the archives and the White House Counsel's Office for correspondence about Mr. Biden's "failure to return highly classified records from his time as vice president."</p> <p>On Wednesday, he took another step in keeping with his promise to hold the Biden administration accountable for what Republicans describe as politicizing federal agencies: pressing the Treasury Department for information about Mr. Biden's family finances.</p> <p>Republicans reveled in Wednesday's disclosure.</p> <p>"It's clear that Biden's staff have no idea how many classified documents are in Biden's former offices and are desperately looking for them," Tommy Pigott, the rapid response director of the Republican National Committee, wrote in an email.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Shakeup: Russia replaces war commander
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-general.html
GIST	<p>Russia has replaced the general in charge of its trouble-plagued war against Ukraine, amid signs of dissension among President Vladimir V. Putin's top allies — a shake-up that critics said would not address what ails the Russian military.</p> <p>Gen. Valery V. Gerasimov, whose appointment the Defense Ministry announced on Wednesday, is a longtime Kremlin ally, chief of the military general staff since 2012, and an executor of the failed plan for the initial invasion in February. It was the second time in just three months that the ministry replaced the chief of the war effort.</p> <p>Outside analysts and hawkish Russian war bloggers said the change was a far cry from the radical overhaul the Russian armed forces need to become more effective.</p> <p>"The sum does not change, just by changing the places of its parts," wrote one prominent blogger who goes by the name Rybar.</p> <p>The reshuffling of commanders came as the Kremlin sharply contradicted a key Putin ally about the pitched combat for Soledar, a small town in eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Yevgeny V. Prigozhin, head of the Wagner mercenary force, said that his troops had seized control of Soledar, posted online a photo of himself with some of the soldiers in what he said was the town's famous salt mine, and made a point of claiming that only Wagner fighters had been battling there on behalf of Russia.</p> <p>But both the Russian Defense Ministry and Ukrainian commanders contradicted those claims on Wednesday, saying that combat continued in Soledar and that the town had not yet fallen. The Russian ministry also said its own troops were fighting there.</p> <p>Dmitri S. Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, urged journalists to wait for official announcements about whether the city had been captured, adding that "tactical successes are certainly very important as they come at a rather expensive price."</p> <p>Neither he nor the ministry mentioned Wagner or its head by name, but their statements amounted to a rebuke of Mr. Prigozhin, who on Wednesday reiterated his claim that his forces had taken control of Soledar.</p> <p>Starting with the failed attempt to seize Kyiv in a lightning assault in February and March, the Russian war effort has been marked by missteps, reversals and heavy casualties.</p>

It shifted to a slow, grinding offensive concentrating on the eastern Donbas that succeeded in capturing several cities at high cost, but then stalled. Then in late summer came a swift Ukrainian counteroffensive that reclaimed a significant amount of occupied territory, and forced a chaotic Russian retreat from the northeastern Kharkiv region.

That prompted the appointment in October of a new Russian commander for the war in Ukraine, Gen. Sergei Surovikin, who had previously headed Russian forces in Syria, where he gained a reputation as a ruthless but effective commander.

General Surovikin revamped a disjointed military structure in Ukraine and ordered construction of defensive lines to slow Ukrainian advances. He also advocated and organized the orderly retreat from the southern city of Kherson and surrounding areas west of the Dnipro River, a move that military analysts said was necessary but that Mr. Putin was said to have previously forbidden.

Now General Surovikin has effectively been demoted, becoming one of three deputies to General Gerasimov. Analysts said the change showed that Mr. Putin remains focused on projecting stability and maintaining the power balance among key allies, rather than correcting the military's fundamental flaws.

"They have taken someone who is competent and replaced him with someone who is incompetent, but who has been there a long time and who has shown that he is loyal," said Dara Massicot, senior policy researcher at the RAND Corporation in Washington. "Whatever is happening in Moscow, it is out of touch with what is happening on the ground in Ukraine."

In an [intelligence assessment](#), the British Defense Ministry said the switch was "a clear acknowledgment that the campaign is falling short of Russia's strategic goals." But it said the move would meet with "extreme displeasure" among pro-war ultranationalists "who have increasingly blamed Gerasimov for the poor execution of the war."

Russian setbacks slowed under General Surovikin, but did not stop. Ukrainian forces, armed with increasingly sophisticated Western weapons, made more gains in Kherson Province and in the Donbas region in the east, and repeatedly struck targets far behind the front lines. A monthslong Russian drive to capture the small city of Bakhmut, in the Donbas, has cost many lives but gained little ground.

A concerted effort to destroy Ukraine's energy systems has failed to bombard the country into submission, while leaving Russia short of precision munitions. And after Mr. Putin ordered the draft of 300,000 additional troops, new conscripts reported being thrown into the fight with minimal training and inadequate equipment. Some were killed after just days in uniform.

The most striking recent failure came on New Year's Day, when Ukrainian artillery struck a complex housing new Russian soldiers in the Donbas city of Makiivka. The Defense Ministry acknowledged that 89 were killed, but Ukraine claimed casualties in the hundreds.

The hawkish Russian military bloggers — a major source of information on the war in a country where the Kremlin controls the media — blamed Russian commanders: They had concentrated the troops rather than spreading them out, had housed them next to an ammunition depot, and had not prevented soldiers from using cellphones, whose signals the Ukrainians apparently used to zero in on their location.

The criticism leveled at uniformed Russian commanders has created an opportunity for Mr. Prigozhin to portray himself and Wagner as indispensable to the war effort. He seems to be trying to raise his political profile within Russia, though to what end is unclear.

Abbas Gallyamov, a former speechwriter for Mr. Putin who has broken ties with the president, said that Mr. Prigozhin was angling to replace Defense Minister Sergei K. Shoigu, a longtime Putin confidant.

Wagner has become a kind of shadow army for Russia, deployed in support of the Kremlin's military campaigns in Africa and the Middle East.

A former convicted criminal, Mr. Prigozhin became a restaurateur and befriended Mr. Putin years ago, parlaying that relationship into a varied business empire, including the Wagner Group. He has been indicted in the United States, where he is accused of orchestrating Russian online meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

This year, Mr. Prigozhin has cast off the modest profile he once tried to maintain.

After long denying any role in election meddling, he recently boasted of it. He has criticized the regular military. And, after saying for years that he had no connection to Wagner — he even questioned whether it existed — he acknowledged in September that he was its founder, and has embraced its role in Ukraine.

Mr. Prigozhin has supplemented Russia's decimated fighting ranks with tens of thousands of prison inmates recruited to his mercenary force, awarded medals, visited military cemeteries and, according to his frequent videos, appeared unexpectedly at the toughest sections of the front line.

In late December, Wagner fighters released a profanity-laden video addressed to the military high command, accusing it of withholding ammunition and causing the deaths of their comrades. Mr. Prigozhin responded to the video by saying "when you're sitting in a warm office, the frontline problems are hard to hear," in apparent reference to the generals.

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HEADLINE	01/11 XBB.1.5: the 'kraken' subvariant
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/briefing/the-kraken-subvariant.html
GIST	<p>A highly contagious version of the Omicron variant — known officially as XBB.1.5 or by its subvariant nickname, Kraken — is quickly spreading in the U.S.</p> <p>The young subvariant was first detected in New York State in the fall. It currently makes up about 28 percent of cases in the U.S. and about 72 percent of cases in the Northeast, according to the C.D.C. It's a highly mutated version of the virus that appears able to better evade immune defenses and invade cells, with some experts calling it the most transmissible variant yet. Scientists say it remains rare in much of the world, but they expect it to spread quickly and globally.</p> <p>To understand more, I spoke to my colleague Carl Zimmer, a science reporter who covers the coronavirus.</p> <p>What should we know about XBB.1.5?</p> <p>It looks like XBB.1.5 is a cut above the other Omicron subvariants in terms of getting around our defenses, and it's also a very transmissible virus. We won't know the full XBB.1.5 story until it's over, but right now it's definitely looking like it could potentially become dominant in the United States, maybe even the world.</p> <p>Is it more deadly than other variants?</p> <p>Unfortunately, there's not a lot of data on its effects. From what I've heard from experts, it doesn't look like it's any more severe, which is good. But it takes time for a variant to become common enough that it infects people in large numbers, and then for some of those people to end up in the hospital, and then to analyze all those numbers. It's really surging here in the northeastern U.S., but we don't have great medical information systems to get quick answers on that.</p> <p>Where did XBB.1.5 come from?</p> <p>XBB.1.5 descends from something called XBB. And XBB is a very unusual form of Covid. It may have emerged in the spring or summer last year, possibly in India.</p>

What's unusual about XBB is that it was the product of two different forms of Omicron that both infected someone. As they were replicating inside that person, their genes were mixed together, and then we got a new hybrid. And this hybrid is very good at evading defenses from vaccines and infections.

So it caused a big surge in Singapore in the fall, but it didn't really become that common elsewhere because it was competing with so many other subvariants. But as it multiplied, it started gaining more mutations. So XBB gave rise to XBB.1, and then XBB.1 mutated again into XBB.1.5. And it looks like XBB.1.5 gained a really crucial mutation that helps it grab tightly onto cells, which makes it more transmissible on top of doing a better job of escaping antibodies. So it looks really concerning. And in places like the northeastern U.S., it's the fastest-growing variant out there.

How worried should we be?

It depends on how you were before. If you weren't worried before, you should have been. And you should remain worried. A year ago, the first Omicron subvariant surged to dominance. Since then we have seen an explosion of new forms of Omicron. And they continue to gain mutations that help them to spread. In December, we had really fast-spreading viruses out there, and now we have one that's even faster. So it's a good time to take it seriously.

What will this do to the course of the pandemic in the U.S.?

I've been talking to scientists who are watching this really closely, and nobody thinks that we're looking at something like what we saw a year ago, when Omicron first slammed into the U.S. Back then, we had the record-breaking caseload and record-breaking hospitalizations. It won't be that bad, but how bad it will be, it's hard to say. There probably will be a surge. And we're already dealing with a lot of Covid in the U.S., so it's a bad time for an even faster-spreading virus to show up.

How will this affect the outbreak in China?

In China, which experienced a large surge of cases in late 2022, its prospects are hard to predict. One possibility is that once other subvariants sweep through China, it will be XBB.1.5's turn to reinfect some people there.

How protective are the new boosters against XBB.1.5?

The preliminary studies are, thankfully, looking pretty good. If you've been boosted, it looks like it probably reduces your chances of getting infected, and it definitely is good for keeping you out of the hospital, especially if you're older.

Unfortunately, our rates of boosting are not great. Even if you've had the two shots of the primary vaccination, you're still quite vulnerable. The updated booster can really protect a lot of people.

What's next in the virus's evolution?

Forecasting evolution is harder than forecasting the weather. But what's interesting is that scientists do have some glimpses into possible futures.

The mutations that have produced XBB.1.5 have actually made it easier for this virus to gain the ability to evade more antibodies. It's become more evolvable, you could say. So an even more evasive form of XBB.1.5 could be showing up soon.

Scientists are able to track the evolution of this virus in a way that they were never able to do in previous years with things like influenza or measles. But they still aren't seeing things exactly in real time. So it's possible that the next new variant is already here. It's possible that someone walking around Rhode Island or Connecticut has already incubated the next big thing.

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HEADLINE	01/11 China faces online rancor over Covid policy
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/world/asia/china-zero-covid-reopening.html

A furious, wide-ranging argument is unfolding on the internet in China over the reversal of the government's strict pandemic policies and the massive Covid surge that followed. The divisions are challenging the Communist Party's efforts to control the narrative around its pandemic pivot.

Since the party abandoned "zero Covid" last month, many online commenters have staked out opposing positions over seemingly all manner of questions. Who should be blamed for the explosion of cases and deaths? Is a top government-appointed health expert trustworthy? Is Omicron really less severe, as Chinese officials now say, when hospitals seem to be filling up with sick patients? They are even arguing over whether people should be allowed to set off fireworks during the upcoming Spring Festival holiday, after many did so during the New Year.

The digital finger-pointing reveals a country that is deeply polarized, with each side distrustful and skeptical of the other — and, to varying degrees, of the party and its proxies. In some cases, the party's own supporters are indirectly questioning its decisions, complicating efforts by the party's censors and propaganda outlets to push its messaging.

"The sudden 180-degree turn from 'zero Covid' has precipitated a new crisis for which the government needs to explain to the people," said Minxin Pei, a professor of government at Claremont McKenna College who studies Chinese politics. The party now needs to contain Covid infections, rescue an economy dragged down by its "zero Covid" policy, and repair the damage to its image caused by the chaotic reopening, Mr. Pei said.

If Beijing moves too hard to quash discord, it could further alienate many who had long defended "zero Covid" and who have been confused or disappointed by the sudden policy U-turn. But if it lets the arguments escalate, it risks muddying its message and seeding more uncertainty.

"It's very damaging for Chinese society if society is divided into very antagonistic groups — who are equally powerless, equally helpless — and they accuse each other," said Xiang Biao, a Germany-based expert on social issues in China.

By far, the more vocal side is made up of those who supported "zero Covid" — a mix of nationalist online influencers, conservative academics, and a number of trolls. Some saw the stringent policy as necessary to save lives in a country where medical services are uneven. Others adopted the party's argument that "zero Covid" was a measure of China's superior political model.

Some voices in the so-called "zero Covid faction" have sought to blame the protesters opposed to lockdowns for the current outbreak and rising deaths, even though the virus had been spreading wildly before the policy U-turn. They call those who supported the end of "zero Covid" "tangfei," or "lying flat bandits," an insulting variation of "lying flat," a term used to refer to a slacker lifestyle that had earlier been co-opted by Chinese state media to criticize Western approaches to coexisting with Covid.

Implied in some of the criticism is that by undoing "zero Covid," the party has empowered its detractors at home and in the West, and weakened its position even among its own loyalists. For a time, online influencers such as Sima Nan, a nationalist, even took to denigrating government-appointed experts such as Zhang Wenhong, a top epidemiologist in Shanghai who had argued against excessive lockdowns, suggesting that Dr. Zhang had misled the public about the severity of Omicron. The vitriol was so great that state media outlets soon called for such personal attacks to stop.

On the other side are those who have welcomed the resumption of school, work, business and travel as not merely a relief from lockdowns but a much-needed retreat by the Communist Party from everyday life. Many identify themselves as part of the "opening up" or "lift lockdowns" faction associated with the university students, migrant workers, residents and small-business owners who protested against "zero Covid" in November.

Even Xi Jinping, the country's top leader, made a rare acknowledgment of the public disagreements, saying in a New Year's address: "It is only natural for different people to have different concerns or hold different views on the same issue."

He emphasized, though, that he expected Chinese people to fall in line, and to "think in one direction, work in one direction. The strength of tomorrow's China comes from unity," he said.

For much of the past three years, Mr. Xi had brooked no opposition, brandishing the "zero Covid" policy as proof of the authoritarian party's superiority in protecting people over that of chaotic Western democracies. Now, along with a mounting public health crisis, the authorities find themselves having to rein in their own usual defenders, those who had helped prop up "zero Covid" as the only way forward.

Tao Siliang, a member of China's Communist elite, recently criticized Sima Nan's attacks for contradicting the party's new direction. On Thursday, Weibo, a social media site, moved quickly to shut down or suspend more than 1,000 accounts, including that of a prominent nationalist, Kong Qingdong, for waging personal attacks against experts and scholars.

"At this moment, what we need most is to abide by the 44-year-old parable: 'Look forward in unity,' do not challenge, tear apart, especially denounce or abuse," the official newspaper of Zhejiang Province, in China's east, wrote in a recent editorial.

But some "zero Covid" defenders, apparently disillusioned by the turn of events, rejected the call for conformity.

"Please tell me, why do I have to unite?" read a post that was liked 30,000 times and was written by a blogger on Weibo who described losing an uncle to complications caused by Covid. "On what basis should I be forced to accept the lone societal argument that everything is going great?"

Some see the opposition to reopening as mostly posturing by online personalities interested in attracting more followers, and predict that the anger will blow over once outbreaks peak and pass, and the economy recovers.

To Wu Qiang, an independent political analyst in Beijing, the online backlash is a sign of a deeper challenge to Beijing. Mr. Xi's New Year address, he said, was a "rare recognition that he is facing objections, criticism and dissatisfaction inside and outside the party."

At the same time, Mr. Wu said, Mr. Xi's "zero Covid" policy of top-down control pushed people to question the party's authoritarian approach, fanning a new political fervor that could, over time, gain momentum. "In some ways, if you look at things from the vantage point of the future, the current 'lying flat' faction is a broad foundation for a future Chinese opposition party," Mr. Wu said.

If there is one issue that both sides seem to agree on, it is that the government is hurting its credibility by not providing reliable data on the extent of Covid outbreaks and deaths across the country. The official Covid death toll is widely ridiculed on Chinese social media as absurdly low. The World Health Organization and several countries have urged Beijing to share more data on hospitalizations and deaths. The information vacuum has fueled speculation by influencers and bloggers who have pushed their own conclusions and conspiracies around the policy pivot.

A key factor in the mutual infighting was the "collapse of public trust," said Mr. Xiang of Oxford, who is also the director of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Germany. "Government data, policies and experts' opinion lost credibility."

In a recent post on social media, Hu Xijin, the nationalist former editor of the Communist Party newspaper, Global Times, suggested that the party could afford to be more open to debate.

	<p>“Our society can have problems and difficulties, but there should not be too many things deemed ‘sensitive,’” he wrote.</p> <p>“In other words, this country is very trustworthy and has the internal motivation to correct mistakes. ‘Sensitivity’ should not belong to China.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 US, Japan to expand military cooperation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/us/politics/us-japan-military-cooperation.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — U.S. and Japanese officials said on Wednesday that the two nations would expand their military cooperation, including improving Japan’s missile strike capabilities and making the U.S. Marine unit in that country more flexible for potential combat.</p> <p>The changes come as both nations perceive greater threatening behavior from China and North Korea, as well as Russia. Those three countries have decades-long partnerships that they have recently affirmed in various settings, despite many nations’ condemnation of Russia over its war in Ukraine.</p> <p>The United States and Japan have been working in recent years to strengthen their military alliance. On Wednesday, Antony J. Blinken, the U.S. secretary of state, and Lloyd J. Austin III, the U.S. defense secretary, met with their Japanese counterparts in Washington to discuss security issues and other matters. President Biden and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan are scheduled to meet in Washington on Friday.</p> <p>“There is clear strategic alignment between the visions of President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida,” Mr. Austin said at a news conference after meetings on Wednesday.</p> <p>He also praised Japan’s decision to increase its annual military spending. Last month, the Kishida administration released a new national security strategy in which Japan committed to spending 2 percent of its gross domestic product on its annual defense budget, a substantial increase that puts it in line with a standard set by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.</p> <p>Mr. Austin also affirmed Japan’s decision to invest more in “counterstrike capabilities,” meaning missiles that can be used for offensive operations. Japan has said it intends to buy hundreds of Tomahawk cruise missiles from the United States.</p> <p>Mr. Blinken said officials from the two nations will sign an agreement on a defense partnership in outer space later this week.</p> <p>Jake Sullivan, the White House national security adviser, said on Wednesday night that “Japan is stepping up big time and doing so in lock step with the United States, partners in the Indo-Pacific and in Europe.”</p> <p>“President Biden’s investment in our alliances is paying huge dividends to bolster deterrence and advance peace and security in the Indo-Pacific and globally,” he added.</p> <p>Under the new U.S. deployment arrangement in Japan, Marines who are serving in Okinawa as part of the 12th Marine Regiment, an artillery unit, will transform into a more mobile unit — the 12th Marine Littoral Regiment. The new configuration will allow them to more easily fan out to other islands along the coast when the need arises, U.S. officials said.</p> <p>The littoral regiment will have battalion-size units, about 2,000 troops total, and have long-range fire capabilities that can hit ships. Mr. Austin said the change will lead to a presence that is “more lethal, more agile, more capable.”</p>

The agreement will not increase the number of Marines serving in Okinawa, officials said. But it will allow Marines to more quickly deploy if tensions intensify in the region. Pentagon officials said the restructuring is in part to deal with China's growing military activity and presence, including around the island of Taiwan, a self-governing democracy that the Chinese Communist Party [intends to bring under its rule](#).

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year has made American, Taiwanese and Japanese officials more anxious about the possibility of China trying a move on Taiwan — perhaps not in the coming months or years, but maybe by the end of the decade. Much depends on how Chinese officials perceive the balance of military strength in the region, which includes American forces, U.S. officials say.

In August, China [alarmed Japan](#) when it fired ballistic missiles in the waters around Taiwan to send a message of aggression to the island and to the United States after [Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited in a show of support](#). Five of the missiles landed in the exclusive economic zone off Japan's coast, the first such occurrence.

Japanese officials have also been disquieted by a series of joint military exercises conducted by China and Russia in the region. The two nations [held one such exercise in May](#), the first one they had done together since Russia invaded Ukraine. Mr. Biden was visiting Tokyo at the time for a meeting of the [Quad](#), a coalition of the United States, Japan, India and Australia that was formed in part to counter China's growing power.

China and Japan have not resolved territorial disputes over waters and islands in the East China Sea. The Japanese and American militaries have noted increased Chinese maritime activity in the area, U.S. officials said.

Japan's bolstering its military capabilities is likely to cause greater unease in South Korea to some degree, given the bitter memories there of Japan's violent occupation of the Korean Peninsula, which still has a profound effect on relations between the two countries. But the United States has been pressing both nations, which share security interests and concerns, to maintain working ties. Besides China, the two countries and the United States are worried about the nuclear weapons program and military actions of North Korea.

The government run by Kim Jong-un, the ruler of North Korea, launched more than 90 ballistic and other missiles in 2022, more than in any other year. It has continued to conduct missile launches this year. American, Japanese and South Korean officials are bracing for a potential nuclear test by North Korea.

Yoshimasa Hayashi, Japan's foreign minister, said on Wednesday that the American and Japanese governments had reaffirmed all aspects of the U.S. defense commitment to Japan, including the U.S. nuclear umbrella that is intended to act as a deterrent.

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HEADLINE	01/11 Calif. damage mounts from week of storms
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/us/california-sinkholes-power-outages-flooding.html
GIST	<p>Another week of storms.</p> <p>The toll of so many days of rain in California became increasingly apparent on Tuesday: An apartment building roof in South San Francisco flew off early in the morning. A sinkhole opened in Chatsworth and swallowed two cars. Two motorists died when a tree fell on them on a highway just north of Visalia, bringing the state's death toll to at least 17 from the round of storms that began in late December.</p> <p>The Golden State has been transformed into a land of mudslides, power outages, flooding, closed schools, toppled trees, blocked roads and many other kinds of chaos. (We've been cataloging the damage in videos, photos and maps.)</p>

	<p>“It’s likely that this is going to be at least several billion dollars” in damage, Jonathan Porter, the chief meteorologist at AccuWeather, told my colleague Christopher Flavelle.</p> <p>Though the storms are undoubtedly intense, scientists and meteorologists say they still haven’t come close to equaling the intensity of the 1861-62 megastorm, the most severe winter weather crisis in the West Coast’s modern history.</p> <p>Beginning in late 1861, atmospheric rivers pummeled the West with wave after wave of rain and snow. Swaths of the Central Valley became unbroken expanses of water. Sacramento residents navigated their city’s flooded streets on rafts buoyed by whiskey barrels.</p> <p>“These storms, while impressive — don’t tell anybody in Santa Barbara they didn’t get hammered by this thing — but it’s just not in the same league as 1861-62, where it encompassed bigger storms over wider areas,” Larry Schick, a meteorologist formerly with the Army Corps of Engineers, told my colleague Raymond Zhong.</p> <p>Whether we approach those 19th-century records will depend on what comes next. Forecasts say that another storm will hit Northern California on Wednesday, while Southern California will be spared. The state will get a reprieve on Thursday and Friday, but another round of wet weather is expected to strike this weekend and not taper off until perhaps the middle of next week.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 ACLU: crackdown FBI use of CIA, NSA
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/11/aclu-calls-crackdown-fbi-use-intel-community-spy-a/
GIST	<p>The American Civil Liberties Union is calling for an overhaul of FBI rules after The Washington Times reported that agents used the CIA and National Security Agency to spy on Americans.</p> <p>The ACLU urged the bureau to impose new limits on agents’ power to investigate Americans without warrants.</p> <p>The FBI’s rule book, rewritten in 2021, revealed details about how the FBI tasks the CIA and NSA for help on matters including assessments, which are investigations that can involve surveillance without a court order against people not accused of a crime.</p> <p>The new Republican-run House was already fed up with the national security community, but the fervor is spreading to include liberal-leaning outfits such as the ACLU.</p> <p>ACLU senior staff attorney Ashley Gorski told The Times there is no question that the FBI must tighten its standards for conducting assessments.</p> <p>“Under this authority, agents engage in certain types of surveillance and deploy informants, even without a factual basis to suspect someone of wrongdoing,” Ms. Gorski said in a statement. “The DIOG and related policies should be reformed to limit these powers, and the FBI should not be enlisting the CIA and NSA in domestic investigations where there’s no suspicion to begin with.”</p> <p>The updated 906-page Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide, written during the Trump administration and revised under President Biden, confirmed a decade-old leak detailing the bureau’s work with the CIA and NSA for investigations that may involve warrantless surveillance. The bureau published the 2021 rules online after rejecting requests to make it public, marking the first time the FBI has shared the rule book since the Obama administration.</p> <p>The words CIA and NSA appear unredacted for section 20.2 of the 2021 rule book, with other information from the section hidden. A leaked 2011 version of the FBI’s rule book containing no redactions obtained</p>

by The Intercept showed section 20.2 involves name trace requests, the mechanism the FBI uses to formally ask other agencies to conduct searches of their records regarding subjects of interest.

Information gathered from the CIA and NSA's searches of their records are available for use in assessments and predicated investigations, according to the leaked 2011 rule book.

The FBI's assessments are investigations of groups and people that do not require accusations of wrongdoing and need only an "authorized purpose" and a clear objective, according to the 2021 rule book. Speculation is not sufficient cause for starting an assessment, which is intended to be reserved for serious issues involving the prevention of federal crimes, protection against national security threats and the collection of foreign intelligence.

The history of people swept up in assessments crosses traditional boundaries of politics and ideology. The conservative Concerned Women for America, a New York chapter of the League of Women Voters, and the Muslim Justice League in Massachusetts are among the groups that have faced FBI assessments, according to records obtained by Cato Institute senior fellow Patrick Eddington.

"We want answers as to why CWA was targeted by FBI," Concerned Women for America said Wednesday in a Twitter post.

A full accounting of who has faced FBI assessments is not known. Mr. Eddington, who has pressed the FBI for access to government records and obtained documentation of agents' rule-breaking, has previously estimated that the FBI made hundreds of thousands of assessments. His estimate was based on data obtained in 2011 by The New York Times indicating that the FBI conducted more than 82,000 assessments for potential wrongdoing in the preceding two years.

The updated rule book's revelation of the FBI's collaboration with the CIA and NSA is expected to fuel conservatives' fire for Republican lawmakers to obtain answers about the FBI's conduct.

Article III Project founder Mike Davis, a former Senate Judiciary Committee counsel for Republicans, said the FBI and intelligence community's politicization has become crystal clear.

"This is illegal, outrageous and dangerous," Mr. Davis said in a statement about the FBI's conduct. "Congress must — and will — fulfill its critical constitutional oversight responsibility by ending this."

Accusations that federal agencies have taken action against Americans, including parents focused on their children's schooling and social media users, have spurred Republican lawmakers' investigations. The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Judiciary Committee are digging into how intelligence agencies target Americans, including via a new panel studying the weaponization of the federal government against U.S. citizens.

Rep. Michael Turner of Ohio, the top Republican on the House intelligence committee, told The Times that the panel underscores how seriously lawmakers take recent disclosures about the FBI. He said his team has additional evidence of FBI wrongdoing.

"The establishment of the new Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government underscores the seriousness for which my colleagues and I take recent public disclosure of FBI actions," he said in a statement. "We also have additional evidence of FBI abuses of private information of U.S. citizens that is alarming. We will work to hold the FBI accountable and will seek to restrict the FBI from conducting any further inappropriate actions."

The FBI did not respond to a request for comment on Wednesday and previously declined to answer questions about its work with the CIA and NSA. The NSA previously declined to comment and referred questions to the FBI.

	The CIA told The Times that it takes seriously its obligation to respect Americans' privacy and follows the law, relevant rules and executive actions.
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HEADLINE	01/11 Lawsuit: lawmakers withhold public records
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/politics-government/article270976447.html
GIST	<p>A lawsuit has been filed in Thurston County Superior Court challenging the Washington State Legislature's use of "legislative privilege" to withhold public records.</p> <p>The lawsuit was filed by open government activist Arthur West, who recently settled a public records lawsuit with the Washington State Redistricting Commission for \$40,000.</p> <p>Court filings show that West is filing for declaratory and injunctive relief regarding whether or not lawmakers can claim legislative privilege to withhold records and shield them from the state's Public Records Act.</p> <p>Additionally, the lawsuit aims to find out whether the constitution itself gives lawmakers the authority to exempt themselves from releasing certain records, with West asserting that legislative privilege is "an issue of major public importance, and an actual dispute between parties having genuinely opposing and substantial interests."</p> <p>McClatchy first reported on state lawmakers' use of legislative privilege on Wednesday Jan. 4. By Thursday, leading legislators were asked during a pre-legislative press conference whether or not they supported using the claim.</p> <p>Some leading lawmakers denied the use of the exemption altogether while some admitted that it is used "rarely."</p> <p>House Speaker Laurie Jenkins, D-Tacoma, and Senate Minority Leader John Braun, R-Centralia, both claimed that the exemption is rooted in a constitutional provision.</p> <p>The existing provision in the Washington State Constitution says that "no member of the legislature shall be liable in any civil action or criminal prosecution whatever, for words spoken in debate," but it does not speak specifically to public records, such as emails and texts, held by legislators.</p> <p>Public records from multiple sources also showed that lawmakers have invoked the privilege more frequently within the last year, and those denials have cited Freedom Foundation v. Gregoire. The 2013 ruling by the Washington state Supreme Court said that governors of the state "could assert executive privilege to justify withholding documents that would otherwise be disclosable under the Public Records Act," according to the American Civil Liberties Union. The law applies only to the executive branch, however.</p> <p>This is not the first time state legislators have tried to conceal public records.</p> <p>In 2018, lawmakers completely bypassed the bill-making process to expedite legislation that would have exempted them from the state's Public Records Act. A bill introduced during the legislative session that year was only public for 48 hours before passing both chambers of the Legislature with overwhelming approval.</p> <p>After no debate, the measure passed the Senate 41-7, and the House with 83-14. Gov. Jay Inslee vetoed the bill shortly thereafter, after news reports about the votes led to public outcry.</p> <p>In 2017, a lawsuit was filed by The Associated Press after the outlet was denied "sexual harassment reports, calendar entries and other documents." Other media outlets also signed on in support of that lawsuit.</p>

	<p>In 2019, the Washington State Supreme Court voted 7-2 in favor of AP's lawsuit to reject "lawmakers' assertion that they are not required to turn over daily schedules, emails, text messages and other materials related to their work," the AP reported.</p> <p>West's lawsuit cites the precedent set by that court decision. The trial date for the new lawsuit is set for May 12.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Starbucks HQ back to office 3days a week
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/starbucks/starbucks-employees-to-go-back-to-office-three-days-a-week/
GIST	<p>Starbucks employees within commuting distance of the coffee giant's headquarters in Seattle will be required to work from the office at least three days a week as of Jan. 30, interim CEO Howard Schultz announced Wednesday.</p> <p>About 3,750 employees are based at the Sodo headquarters. The policy will also apply to workers within commuting distance of regional offices, Schultz said in a letter to employees.</p> <p>Two of the days will be Tuesday and Wednesday, while the other day will be up to individual teams.</p> <p>Starbucks had implemented a model to return to the office one to two times a week in September, but many employees were "not meeting their minimum promise," Schultz said. In-person work, he said, is critical to the company's success.</p> <p>Schultz said the company is changing its policy because of culture, fairness and a need to correct "the unintended consequences that have emerged from conducting so much of our work virtually."</p> <p>The lack of human connection has put Starbucks' brand "into peril," Schultz wrote, adding that many employees crave a bigger meaning in their work. According to a survey conducted last year, first reported by Bloomberg, Starbucks employees were losing faith in the company's ethics and social impact — marking a "historic low" in those statistics.</p> <p>He also said it is unfair that office employees can work from home while store employees have to work in person. Still, the company is analyzing how to make the adjustment to in-person work.</p> <p>"We acknowledge that we have some work still to do as we reimagine the future of the workplace given the policy shift we are announcing today," Schultz said in the letter. He added he wants the headquarters and regional offices to be "vibrant hubs" of people working together.</p> <p>Across the Seattle area, employers' return-to-office policies have been uneven. In April last year, Microsoft required half of employees' work to be in person, unless employees have permission from their managers. And in February, city of Seattle employees were told to return to the office. Amazon, one of the largest employers in the area, has not announced a return-to-office plan yet. Many employers in downtown Seattle saw a slower return to the office than anticipated through most of the past year.</p> <p>"The pandemic was a full-out attack on the ideas that make Starbucks, Starbucks," Schultz said. "Partners, it's time for us to come back to the office." (The company refers to its employees as partners.)</p> <p>The announcement comes at a time of reinvention for the company, which has been grappling with unionization efforts in its stores nationwide. New CEO Laxman Narasimhan will start this year as Schultz transitions to a role on the board of directors. Starbucks' \$450 million "Reinvention" plan, announced in September, will be rolled out this year and includes steps to improve employee relations and a new focus on drive-thru stores rather than cafes.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Atmospheric river: heavy rain, winds, floods
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/atmospheric-river-to-bring-rain-possible-flooding-to-western-washington/
GIST	<p>An atmospheric river moving from storm-battered California will bring heavy rainfall and flooding risks to Western Washington through the end of the week, according to the National Weather Service.</p> <p>About 1 to 1 1/2 inches of rain accompanied by possible river flooding are expected in the lowlands, said weather service meteorologist Samantha Borth. High winds began to move into the region on Wednesday, Borth said, accompanying a “slew of hazards” that includes flooding, rain and landslide potential.</p> <p>The weather service warned that heavy rainfall will increase the threat of landslides throughout the region.</p> <p>A flood warning beginning late Wednesday night is in effect for Skokomish River at Potlatch in Mason County.</p> <p>Rain began to hit the coast Wednesday afternoon before moving inland through the evening hours, affecting the Seattle-area evening commute, Borth said.</p> <p>Wind gusts could reach 35 mph on Thursday, potentially causing localized power outages and downed tree limbs.</p> <p>Borth said the Olympic Peninsula will be hit the hardest by heavy rain, which can be expected into Saturday. Generally up to 5 inches is expected over the Olympics, with over 8 inches of rain possible in some areas.</p> <p>High surf will cause localized beach erosion and dangerous surf conditions.</p> <p>Snow levels have remained low over the Cascades, Borth said, but snow is expected along Stevens Pass Thursday morning and travelers should check forecasts and road conditions before heading out.</p> <p>Avalanche control will close Stevens Pass starting at 8 a.m. on Thursday, according to the Washington State Department of Transportation. Cleanup can take up to two hours.</p> <p>Temperatures in Seattle are expected to remain mild, with lows in the 40s and highs in the early 50s throughout the rest of the week.</p> <p>Heavy rains over the mountains will turn more showery before a more widespread area of rain moves into the region Saturday night into Sunday morning, according to the weather service.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Microsoft: US workers unlimited time off
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/microsoft-says-it-will-give-u-s-workers-unlimited-time-off/
GIST	<p>Microsoft said it is shifting vacation policy to give U.S. workers unlimited time off, matching a system already in place at its LinkedIn unit.</p> <p>The changes start Jan. 16 and apply only to full-time employees in the U.S., according to a company spokesperson. The company has been considering the change for a few years in order to adapt to more flexible working schedules.</p> <p>This kind of policy, in place at companies like Netflix and for senior bankers at Goldman Sachs Group can prove challenging when managers set expectations that favor little or no time off. The spokesperson said that Microsoft has considered the possible flaws in such a system and that the company expects it can ensure workers get adequate vacation time.</p>

	Unlimited time can also be a boon for employers because the plan requires less work to administer and because employees who quit or are fired don't have to be compensated for accrued, unused time. Microsoft will make a one-time payout in April to workers with accrued time.
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HEADLINE	01/11 Covid public health emergency extended
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/us-extends-covid-public-health-emergency-maintaining-access-to-care/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The U.S. government again extended the COVID-19 public health emergency, maintaining measures that have expanded access to health care for millions of Americans since the outbreak began in 2020.</p> <p>The Department of Health and Human Services has repeatedly renewed the emergency designation in 90-day increments since it was originally declared by the Trump administration in January 2020. On Wednesday, HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra extended the emergency through mid-April, a move some health experts anticipate could be the last renewal.</p> <p>The Biden administration has said it will give states 60 days' notice before ending the emergency to allow sufficient time to prepare for changes to certain programs and regulatory authorities. That means were it to unwind the designation, it would give notice in February.</p> <p>A spokesperson for HHS reaffirmed the department's commitment to provide 60 days' notice to states prior to the declaration's termination, but declined to comment on when termination might come. The White House declined to comment.</p> <p>For more than a year, Republican lawmakers have called on the Biden administration to end the public health emergency, describing it as heavy-handed government intervention. Health policy experts suggest that the health department must ensure protections for vulnerable people before unwinding the emergency designation, especially during the winter, when the risk of COVID-19 transmission rises.</p> <p>Some measures granted under the public health emergency would remain if the designation is unwound in April. Congress' \$1.7 trillion year-end spending plan includes a two-year extension of Medicare telehealth coverage, for example.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Port of Seattle anti-human trafficking pledge
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/port-seattle-announces-anti-human-trafficking-pledge-its-facilities/KEF6HI5RINB4JFDT67AWPZKZ74/
GIST	<p>Port of Seattle leaders reaffirmed their efforts to fight human trafficking with a new pledge Wednesday.</p> <p>"We know that King County is a hotspot for the international circuit for human trafficking," Toshiko Hasegawa, Port of Seattle Commission Vice President, said on Wednesday. "People move through Sea-Tac Airport and maritime facilities across the globe. So the Port of Seattle is actually uniquely positioned to lead on addressing human trafficking and leading on the efforts to combat it. Human trafficking is one of the largest underground economies in the world."</p> <p>The new pledge, called Port Allies Against Human Trafficking (PAAHT), is an alliance between port leaders, tenants, major airlines (including Alaska Airlines and Delta Air Lines), and partners throughout port facilities.</p> <p>Organizations signing onto the pledge agree to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorse and amplify port-led public education campaigns on human trafficking at port facilities • Promote participation in awareness training for staff to recognize typical trafficking signs and behaviors

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate staff on how to report signs and behaviors via the National Human Trafficking Hotline <p>“We urge all interested organizations and Port of Seattle partners to join us,” said Sam Cho, Port of Seattle Commission President. “Take the pledge today, so that your employees can add to our eyes and our ears to report suspected human trafficking behavior.”</p> <p>On Tuesday, the Port of Seattle Commission approved a proclamation to recognize January as National Human Trafficking Awareness Month.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Cho also announced the port is a recipient of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s 2022 Human Trafficking in Transportation Impact Award. The port will receive \$50,000 of funding for Sea-Tac Airport to work “with other U.S. airports to develop a common educational program to raise awareness for how to spot and stop human trafficking,” Cho said on Wednesday.</p> <p>Sea-Tac Airport currently has 310 anti-trafficking signs posted in restrooms and passenger loading bridges. There are also 30 at Port of Seattle parks and at Fisherman’s Terminal.</p> <p>“Raising awareness of how to recognize and report suspected trafficking works. A call to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in late 2021 resulted in the arrest of a 23-year-old Seattle man in February 2022 at Sea-Tac Airport,” Hasegawa said. “When he arrived, (he believed) he was there to pick up a 17-year-old minor. But he had been communicating with an undercover law enforcement agent instead. Just last month, that man was sentenced 10 years in prison for attempted sex-trafficking of a minor. That conviction came because someone recognized the signs of the behavior, and made a phone call.”</p> <p>If you believe you may have information about a trafficking situation, you can call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text at 233733.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Iran to station warships in Panama Canal
SOURCE	https://freebeacon.com/national-security/iran-to-station-warships-in-panama-canal/
GIST	<p>Iran's navy is set to station warships for the first time in the Panama Canal, a critical trade route in America's backyard that has never before seen an Iranian military presence.</p> <p>Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, the commander of Iran's navy, said on Wednesday that his forces will establish a presence in the Panama Canal later this year, marking the first time Iran's military has entered the Pacific Ocean.</p> <p>Iran in recent years has placed a greater focus on moving its military into Latin American territories as it strengthens relations with anti-American dictators in the region, most notably in Venezuela. Iranian vessels have docked more frequently in Venezuela as Tehran's hardline regime seeks to prop up dictator Nicolás Maduro. These moves are meant to provoke the United States and signal that Tehran has the ability to station its military apparatus a stone's throw from U.S. territory.</p> <p>Joseph Humire, a national security analyst who focuses on Latin American issues as executive director of the Center for a Secure Free Society think tank, said Iran has been laying the groundwork for this type of voyage by holding joint exercises with allies such as Russia and China, two nations that have also been strengthening their ties with Latin American countries.</p> <p>"This is what Iran has been building in Latin America for the past 30 or 40 years" by establishing embassies and bilateral agreements with a host of nations, Humire said.</p> <p>Iran's goal "has always been to have a military presence in Latin America, so it's not surprising at all for its navy to announce it's going to make moves on the Panama Canal," Humire said, noting that in addition to Venezuela and Nicaragua, Iran has opened relations with Colombia.</p>

	<p>"This is a tremendous escalation if it is to happen," Humire said. "Many people may discount Iran in terms of its capabilities ... but I would not discount it because they have been building to this for a very long time."</p> <p>Iranian rear admiral Irani said the navy presence in the Panama Canal is meant to "strengthen our maritime presence in international waters," according to comments published by Iran's state-controlled media.</p> <p>"Today we can say that there is no scientific barrier to grow in that field," Irani said, adding that the Iranian naval forces are sailing in the Pacific Ocean for the first time.</p> <p>It is likely Iran sees its presence in Latin America as a means to bolster and protect its interests in countries like Venezuela, where Iran has been helping Maduro repair his country's dilapidated oil refineries. The two rogue regimes signed a 20-year cooperation plan in June 2022, when hardline Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi was in the country for meetings with Maduro.</p> <p>Latin American dictatorships have also served as a hub for Iran to evade U.S. sanctions and make arms deals.</p> <p>Hezbollah, the Iranian-controlled terror group, also has a presence in Latin America that has been gaining ground for years. Hezbollah militants are known to travel freely in Venezuela and across the relatively lawless Tri-Border Area that includes Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Peru govt protests, unrest continues
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/peru-government-protests-dozens-killed-political-unrest-pedro-castillo-dina-boluarte/
GIST	<p>Protests against Peruvian President Dina Boluarte's government that have left 47 people dead since they began a month ago spread through the south of the Andean country on Wednesday with new clashes reported in the tourist city of Cusco.</p> <p>Health officials in Cusco said 16 civilians and six police officers were injured after protesters tried to take over the city's airport, where many foreign tourists arrive to see sites including the nearby Incan citadel of Machu Picchu.</p> <p>Protests and road blockades against Boluarte and in support of ousted President Pedro Castillo were also seen in 41 provinces, mainly in Peru's south.</p> <p>The unrest began in early December following the destitution and arrest of Castillo, Peru's first president of humble, rural roots, following his widely condemned attempt to dissolve Congress and head off his own impeachment.</p> <p>The protest, mainly in neglected rural areas of the country still loyal to Castillo, are seeking immediate elections, Boluarte's resignation, Castillo's release and justice for the protesters killed in clashes with police.</p> <p>Some of the worst protest violence came on Monday when 17 people were killed in clashes with police in the city Juliaca near Lake Titicaca and protesters later attacked and burned a police officer to death.</p> <p>In total, Peru's Ombudsman's Office said that 39 civilians have been killed in clashes with police and another seven died in traffic accidents related to road blockades, as well as the fallen police officer.</p> <p>Peru's government has announced a three-day curfew from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. in Puno.</p>

	<p>The National Prosecutor's Office said it has requested information from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the defense and interior ministries for an investigation it has opened against Boluarte and other officials for the protest deaths.</p> <p>In Juliaca, in Puno province, a crowd marched alongside the coffins of the 17 people killed in Monday's protests.</p> <p>"Dina killed me with bullets," said a piece of paper attached to the coffin of Eberth Mamani Arqui, in a reference to Peru's current president.</p> <p>"This democracy is no longer a democracy," chanted the relatives of the victims.</p> <p>As they passed a police station, which was guarded by dozens of officers, the marchers yelled: "Murderers!"</p> <p>Meanwhile, a delegation from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights began a visit to Peru on to look into the protests and the police response.</p> <p>Boluarte was Castillo's former running mate before taking over the presidency. She has said she supports a plan to push up to 2024 elections for president and congress originally scheduled for 2026. She's also expressed support for judicial investigations into whether security forces acted with excessive force.</p> <p>But such moves have so far failed to quell the unrest, which after a short respite around the Christmas and New Year's holidays have resumed with force in some of Peru's poorest areas.</p> <p>Castillo, a political novice who lived in a two-story adobe home in the Andean highlands before moving to the presidential palace, eked out a narrow victory in elections in 2021 that rocked Peru's political establishment and laid bare the deep divisions between residents of the capital, Lima, and the long-neglected countryside.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Australia healthcare sector targeted
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/australian-healthcare-sector-targeted.html
GIST	<p>A recent wave of Gootkit malware loader attacks has targeted the Australian healthcare sector by leveraging legitimate tools like VLC Media Player.</p> <p>Gootkit, also called Gootloader, is known to employ search engine optimization (SEO) poisoning tactics (aka spamdexing) for initial access. It typically works by compromising and abusing legitimate infrastructure and seeding those sites with common keywords.</p> <p>Like other malware of its kind, Gootkit is capable of stealing data from the browser, performing adversary-in-the-browser (AitB) attacks, keylogging, taking screenshots, and other malicious actions.</p> <p>Trend Micro's new findings reveal that the keywords "hospital," "health," "medical," and "enterprise agreement" have been paired with various city names in Australia, marking the malware's expansion beyond accounting and law firms.</p> <p>The starting point of the cyber assault is to direct users searching for the same keywords to an infected WordPress blog that tricks them into downloading malware-laced ZIP files.</p>

	<p>"Upon accessing the site, the user is presented with a screen that has been made to look like a legitimate forum," Trend Micro researchers said. "Users are led to access the link so that the malicious ZIP file can be downloaded."</p> <p>What's more, the JavaScript code that's used to pull off this trickery is injected into a valid JavaScript file at random sections on the breached website.</p> <p>The downloaded ZIP archive, for its part, also contains a JavaScript file that, upon execution, not only employs obfuscation to evade analysis, but is further used to establish persistence on the machine by means of a scheduled task.</p> <p>The execution chain subsequently leads to a PowerShell script that's designed to retrieve files from a remote server for post-exploitation activity, which commences only after a waiting period that ranges from a couple of hours to as long as two days.</p> <p>"This latency, which clearly separates the initial infection stage from the second stage, is a distinctive feature of Gootkit loader's operation," the researchers said.</p> <p>Once the wait time elapses, two additional payloads are dropped – msdtc.exe and libvlc.dll – the former of which is a legitimate VLC Media Player binary that's used to load the Cobalt Strike DLL component, followed by downloading more tools to facilitate discovery.</p> <p>"The malicious actors behind [Gootkit] are actively implementing their campaign," the researchers said. "The threats targeting specific job sectors, industries, and geographic areas are becoming more aggressive."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Can repurpose, reuse Raspberry Robin?
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/new-analysis-reveals-raspberry-robin.html
GIST	<p>A new analysis of Raspberry Robin's attack infrastructure has revealed that it's possible for other threat actors to repurpose the infections for their own malicious activities, making it an even more potent threat.</p> <p>Raspberry Robin (aka QNAP worm), attributed to a threat actor dubbed DEV-0856, is a malware that has increasingly come under the radar for being used in attacks aimed at finance, government, insurance, and telecom entities.</p> <p>Given its use by multiple threat actors to drop a wide range of payloads such as SocGhosh, Bumblebee, TrueBot, IcedID, and LockBit ransomware, it's believed to be a pay-per-install (PPI) botnet capable of serving next-stage malware.</p> <p>Raspberry Robin, notably, employs infected USB drives as a propagation mechanism and leverages breached QNAP network-attached storage (NAS) devices as first-level command-and-control (C2).</p> <p>Cybersecurity firm SEKOIA said it was able to identify at least eight virtual private servers (VPSs) hosted on Linode that function as a second C2 layer that likely act as forward proxies to the next as-yet-unknown tier.</p> <p>"Each compromised QNAP seems to act as a validator and forwarder," the France-based company said. "If the received request is valid, it is redirected to an upper level of infrastructure."</p> <p>The attack chain thus unfolds as follows: When a user inserts the USB drive and launches a Windows shortcut (.LNK) file, the msiexec utility is launched, which, in turn, downloads the main obfuscated Raspberry Robin payload from the QNAP instance.</p>

This reliance on msisexec to send out HTTP requests to fetch the malware makes it possible to hijack such requests to download another rogue MSI payload either by DNS hijacking attacks or purchasing previously known domains after their expiration.

One such domain is tiua[.]uk, which was registered in the early days of the campaign in late July 2021 and used as a C2 between September 22, 2021, and November 30, 2022, when it was suspended by the .UK registry.

"By pointing this domain to our sinkhole, we were able to obtain telemetry from one of the first domains used by Raspberry Robin operators," the company said, adding it observed several victims, indicating "it was still possible to repurpose a Raspberry Robin domain for malicious activities."

The exact origins of how the first wave of Raspberry Robin USB infections took place remain currently unknown, although it's suspected that it may have been achieved by relying on other malware to disseminate the worm.

This hypothesis is [evidenced](#) by the presence of a .NET spreader module that's said to be responsible for distributing Raspberry Robin .LNK files from infected hosts to USB drives. These .LNK files subsequently compromise other machines via the aforementioned method.

The development comes days after Google's Mandiant [disclosed](#) that the Russia-linked Turla group reused expired domains associated with ANDROMEDA malware to deliver reconnaissance and backdoor tools to targets compromised by the latter in Ukraine.

"Botnets serve multiple purposes and can be reused and/or remodeled by their operators or even hijacked by other groups over time," the researchers said.

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HEADLINE	01/11 New FDA authorities for medical device
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/feature/device-security/new-fda-authority-for-medical-device-security-signals-big-changes-for-manufacturers
GIST	<p>For the last decade, healthcare provider organizations have borne the brunt of securing the expansive, complex medical device ecosystem. And most of even the best-equipped health systems struggle (and don't) close all medical device security risks.</p> <p>But all that may soon change, at least for premarket device submissions.</p> <p>The sweeping \$1.7 trillion omnibus package passed in December included measures that give the FDA new authorities to establish medical device security requirements for manufacturers, which has led to overwhelming praise from the healthcare sector.</p> <p>The omnibus included "long desired FDA authorities" previously left out of the continuing resolution, said Carter Groome, CEO of First Health Advisory. Some of these requirements for premarket submissions were included in the Protecting and Transforming Cyber Health Care (PATCH) Act, which heralded broad support from industry stakeholders.</p> <p>The last FDA appropriations bill passed in September without PATCH Act elements, despite overwhelming bipartisan support — much to the chagrin of medical device security leaders. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 includes some, but not all, of the language of the PATCH Act.</p> <p>"Although watered down from PATCH Act asks, it's a big step forward for health sector resilience and ultimately the safety of people reliant on the integrity and availability of medical devices," said Groome, who's also a post-market medical device security advisor and member of the Health Sector Coordinating Council (HSCC).</p>

But even the smallest step on healthcare cybersecurity is a huge win for provider organizations.

Specifically, the law gives the FDA \$5 million and the authority to ensure all new medical devices brought to market are designed with security in mind. That means, in the near future, all medical device submissions will be required to include a software bill of materials and adequate evidence to demonstrate the product can be updated and patched.

These submissions must also include a description of security testing and controls.

From an outside perspective, it may appear as if manufacturers may be blind-sided by the upcoming shift. However, “neither the Patch Act nor HR2617 should be a surprise to anyone,” said Richard Staynings, professor of information & communications tech, health informatics, healthcare management at the University of Denver.

These vendors should have been “well aware of what is needed from them to secure their products and should have been working towards these goals for many years already,” he added.

To Staynings, who is also the chief security strategist of medical device company Cylera, the inclusion of device requirements is “a very welcomed development by the cybersecurity community, including the many security vendors who support healthcare.”

“Together these legislative changes should go a long way to plug some of the holes seen in healthcare targeting by cybercriminals and pariah nation states going back many years,” Staynings told SC Media. “The FDA is now finally empowered to secure medical devices and other healthcare IoT.”

“Manufacturers will be required to demonstrate ‘reasonable assurances and effective security plans’ to FDA as part of their product submission,” he added.

As industry stakeholders watch for the law’s impacts to unfold, including possible increases in manufacturer costs, SC Media spoke with Staynings to further discuss what manufacturers should be doing now to prepare for these sweeping changes.

New authorities means improved medical device security

The law also empowers ongoing work to bolster healthcare cybersecurity through the partnership of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, explained Staynings.

Within the next two years, the FDA and CISA must work together to define these security requirements, as risks and threats continue to evolve. The idea is to “combine the domain expertise of the FDA around the safety of medical devices with the domain expertise of CISA to better protect medical devices from cyberattack,” said Staynings.

One of the drawbacks, however, is that much of the law centers around pre-market requirements, some of which modify the most recently published FDA Pre-Market Guidance from April 2022.

It’s an important piece of the puzzle but “not a homerun” due to the continued “legacy of non-binding recommendations,” said Groome. In contrast, the ideal scenario would move beyond recommendations to a set of requirements across the board.

The law may not be a grand slam, but it’s certainly “a double.” Groome said he believes there will be an impact on medical device security, unimaginable even a year or two ago, as manufacturers will now need to take monitoring, identifying and addressing post-market vulnerabilities more seriously.

“The expectation is the health sector will be better prepared to mitigate device downtime risk, more efficiently coordinate with manufacturers, and validate baselines and get patches or updates more quickly,” he continued.

Manufacturers were asked for more skin in the game, now it's a requirement

The [FDA has long-noted that it's simply](#) not waiting to act on the patient safety risks posed by vulnerable devices. Even before these new authorities, the agency took a number of steps that suggested a shift to require the inclusion of an SBOM with each device to overhaul the current status quo.

Some security leaders have expressed concerns that many providers are ill-equipped to fully leverage SBOMs, but the inclusion will still have a sweeping impact on the risk assessment challenges currently facing these organizations.

Namely, by having to disclose a full SBOM, “manufacturers will no longer be the single source of truth, and consequently, the single point of failure,” said Staynings. SBOMs will support identification of vulnerabilities commonly used in applications and the underlying operating systems.

For example, Windows XP is embedded in many medical devices today despite its end-of-life status,” he continued. The FDA has requested this information from manufacturers since 2018, but many have dragged their feet on providing “full transparency for fear of disclosure to other manufactures and have dragged their feet.”

As the FDA is now empowered “to demand publication” of SBOMs, manufacturers that have resisted change will now be forced to make changes in order to operate in the healthcare space.

The agency will likely publish a date in the future that will outline when manufacturers must comply with the new rules, or risk having the device sent back to resolve any deficiencies. What’s unclear, as suggested by Groome, is what will be done for current and recently approved devices.

In particular, questions remain for how long the FDA will allow the manufacture and sale of these devices if they do not meet the new rules, Staynings explained. It’s also unclear how the FDA will handle “post-market manufacturer support of current and legacy systems and whether SBOMs and a coordinated disclosure of vulnerabilities will be required.”

It’s likely these questions will be answered in the forthcoming rules, which Staynings said he believes won’t take long to publish as these market shifts have been in the works for many years. The FDA also had “ample time to review the final version of the Patch Act from 2022 and to consider how it will enforce the act’s requirements.”

“Manufacturers have had many years — if not the better part of a decade — to prepare for these changes. Some, however, have chosen to ignore the security tsunami heading their way and will not be prepared,” said Staynings.

“They will likely petition for delays in the enforcement of rules so they can continue to sell their insecure medical devices.”

“Unfortunately, the power of the healthcare lobby is such that tardy or negligent manufacturers may get away with it for some time, at the expense of hospital cybersecurity and patient safety,” he concluded.

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HEADLINE	01/11 Hackers target customer, employee data
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/customer-employee-data-hackers/
GIST	<p>The theft of customer and employee data accounts for almost half (45%) of all stolen data between July 2021 and June 2022, according to a new report from Imperva.</p> <p>Companies’ source code and proprietary information accounted for 6.7% and 6.5% of stolen data, respectively.</p> <p>In what Imperva identified as a positive finding, their research found that theft of credit card information and password details dropped by 64% compared to 2021.</p>

The data is part of a 12-month analysis by Imperva Threat Research on the trends and threats related to data security in its report [More Lessons Learned from Analyzing 100 Data Breaches](#).

Terry Ray, SVP and field CTO at Imperva, said that the decline in stolen credit card and password data pointed to the uptake of basic security tactics like multi-factor authentication (MFA).

“However, in the long term, PII data is the most valuable to cyber-criminals. With enough stolen PII, they can engage in full-on identity theft which is hugely profitable and very difficult to prevent. Credit cards and passwords can be changed the second there is a breach, but when PII is stolen, it can be years before it is weaponized by hackers,” he said.

The research also revealed the root causes of data breaches, with social engineering (17%) and unsecured databases (15%) two of the biggest culprits. Misconfigured applications were only responsible for 2% of data breaches, but Imperva said that businesses should expect this figure to rise in the near future, particularly with cloud-managed infrastructure where configuring for security requires significant expertise.

“It’s really concerning that a third (32%) of data breaches are down to unsecured databases and social engineering attacks, since they’re both straightforward to mitigate,” said Ray. “A publicly open database dramatically increases the risk of a breach and, all too often, they are left like this not out of a failure of security practices but rather the total absence of any security posture at all.”

The company also identified four new profiles for the main types of attackers:

1. **The Hit and Run attacker** – This is when an attacker identifies an opportunity – a vulnerability, publicly open database, or something else – and takes what they can, and leaves. This kind of attacker won’t search for other databases, penetrate the organization’s network, or try to execute exotic exploits, etc. They will only take what they can easily, and sell it to the highest bidder. Organizations make it easy for Hit and Run attackers to steal data by failing to reduce visibility of operations and workloads on publicly open services in the cloud.
2. **The Curious attacker** – This involves breaches where the attacker usually sets out with a purpose, but ends up with enough interest to have a look around at what else they can steal, whilst executing their original plan whether that be malware deployment or data exfiltration etc...
3. **The Resident attacker** – As the most dangerous type, this type of cyber-criminal will penetrate a network and stay around for months or maybe years, all while the organization remains unaware. They often use methods including keyloggers and sniffers to steal credentials and compromise databases.
4. **The Inside attacker** – This is the most prevalent profile that leads to attacks. This is activated by employees accidentally leaving data exposed, or for malicious means whereby the motive is usually money accompanied by a dislike for the company.

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HEADLINE	01/11 Dark Pink APT group: espionage style
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/espionage-meets-color-dark-pink-apt-group/
GIST	<p>Group-IB’s recent blog warns of a relatively new advanced persistent threat (APT) group which brings more dangerous espionage techniques and procedures to the table than seen before.</p> <p>Labelled ‘Dark Pink’ by Group-IB’s analysts; this APT group is behind a new wave of attacks that have struck the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region.</p> <p>This APT group has also been termed Saaiwc Group by Chinese cybersecurity researchers. Dark Pink’s operations can be dated as far back as mid-2021 according to Group-IB’s researchers who identified activity on its GitHub account. However, the group’s activity surged in the period from mid to late 2022.</p>

In their detailed report, Group-IB states that their sector-leading Threat Intelligence uncovered seven confirmed attacks by Dark Pink. The majority of these attacks were in the APAC region with just one carried out against a European governmental ministry.

“The confirmed victims include two military bodies in the Philippines and Malaysia, government agencies in Cambodia, Indonesia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a religious organization in Vietnam. Group-IB also became aware of an unsuccessful attack on a European state development agency based in Vietnam,” the [blog post](#) states.

Timeline and targets of Dark Pink APT group (Image: Group-IB)

What makes Dark Pink’s attacks so effective is their use of a new set of tactics, techniques, and procedures rarely ever seen before amongst APT groups. Their custom toolkit consists of TelePowerBot, KamiKakaBot, and Cucky and Ctealer information stealers (all names given by Group-IB). They are also able to infect USB devices attached to compromised computers and gain access to messengers on infected machines.

One of Dark Pink’s [spear-phishing](#) emails used to gain initial access was found by Group-IB. In this particular instance, the threat actor posed as a job applicant applying for the PR and Communications intern position.

In the email, the threat actor mentions that they found the vacancy on a jobseeker site, which could suggest that the threat actors scan job boards and use this information to create highly relevant phishing emails. This only goes to show how carefully these phishing emails are curated for them to become so threatening.

In the aforementioned attack, the email contained a shortened URL linking to a free-to-use file-sharing site where the victim can choose to download an [ISO image](#). This contains all the files needed for the threat actors to infect the victim’s network.

In this situation, the victim is likely to look for the supposed applicant’s resume, often sent as an [MS Word document](#), but the threat actor included a .exe file that mimicked an MS Word file. By using the MS Word icon and writing “.doc” in the file name, the threat actors tried to confuse the victim into believing the file was safe to open.

Group-IB details all their findings regarding Dark Pink’s kill chains, initial access, reconnaissance and lateral movement, data exfiltration, evasion techniques, and tools. They hope that this preliminary research will allow cybersecurity experts to raise awareness of the new TTPs utilized by Dark Pink and will aid organizations in taking relevant steps to protect themselves from potentially [devastating APT attacks](#).

Along with shedding light on the detrimental effects of APT groups leveraging new TTPs, it is our aim to highlight a set of precautions that can be taken by organizations in order to protect themselves from targeted and highly decisive attacks.

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HEADLINE	01/11 Twitter: leaked data 200M users not stolen
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/twitter-claims-leaked-data-of-200m-users-not-stolen-from-its-systems/
GIST	<p>Twitter finally addressed reports that a dataset of email addresses linked to hundreds of millions of Twitter users was leaked and put up for sale online, saying that it found no evidence the data was obtained by exploiting a vulnerability in its systems.</p> <p>"In response to recent media reports of Twitter users' data being sold online, we conducted a thorough investigation and there is no evidence that data recently being sold was obtained by exploiting a vulnerability of Twitter systems," the company said.</p>

In August, the company [confirmed](#) that a [data leak](#) impacting 5.4 million Twitter users resulted from threat actors exploiting a vulnerability fixed in January 2022.

This flaw enabled the attackers to link email addresses and phone numbers to Twitter users' accounts.

Today, Twitter said that another dataset containing [email addresses linked to 200 million Twitter users](#) that reportedly got leaked online earlier this month was not obtained by exploiting the vulnerability patched in January 2022.

"[The] 200 million dataset could not be correlated with the previously reported incident or any data originating from an exploitation of Twitter systems," Twitter said.

"None of the datasets analyzed contained passwords or information that could lead to passwords being compromised."

The company added that "based on information and intel analyzed to investigate the issue, there is no evidence that the data being sold online was obtained by exploiting a vulnerability of Twitter systems. The data is likely a collection of data already publicly available online through different sources."

However, Twitter failed to explain in today's statement how the Twitter users' leaked data was accurately linked to email addresses associated with their accounts.

Twitter added that it's currently in contact with Data Protection Authorities and other relevant data regulator bodies in multiple countries to provide additional details regarding the "alleged incidents."

In December 2022, the Irish Data Protection Commission (DPC) announced that it launched an inquiry and "[raised queries in relation to GDPR compliance](#)" following news reports that the personal information of 5.4 million Twitter users was leaked online.

Two years before, in December 2020, the DPC [fined Twitter €450,000](#) (~\$550,000) after it failed to notify the data watchdog of a breach within the 72-hour timeframe required by EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

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HEADLINE	01/11 Using old Intel driver to bypass security
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/scattered-spider-hackers-use-old-intel-driver-to-bypass-security/
GIST	<p>A financially motivated threat actor tracked as Scattered Spider was observed attempting to deploy Intel Ethernet diagnostics drivers in a BYOVD (Bring Your Own Vulnerable Driver) attack to evade detection from EDR (Endpoint Detection and Response) security products.</p> <p>The BYOVD technique involves threat actors using a kernel-mode driver known to be vulnerable to exploits as part of their attacks to gain higher privileges in Windows.</p> <p>Because device drivers have kernel access to the operating system, exploiting a flaw in them allows threat actors to execute code with the highest privileges in Windows.</p> <p>CrowdStrike saw this new tactic right after the publication of the cyberintelligence firm's previous report on Scattered Spider at the start of last month.</p> <p>According to the latest CrowdStrike report, the hackers attempted to use the BYOVD method to bypass Microsoft Defender for Endpoint, Palo Alto Networks Cortex XDR, and SentinelOne.</p> <p>Disabling security products</p>

CrowdStrike reports that the Scattered Spider threat actor was seen attempting to exploit [CVE-2015-2291](#), a high-severity vulnerability in the Intel Ethernet diagnostics driver that allows an attacker to execute arbitrary code with kernel privileges using specially crafted calls.

Although this vulnerability was fixed in 2015, by planting an older, still vulnerable version on the breached devices, the threat actors can leverage the flaw no matter what updates the victim has applied to the system.

The driver used by Scattered Spider is a small 64-bit kernel driver with 35 functions, signed by different certificates stolen from signing authorities like NVIDIA and Global Software LLC, so Windows doesn't block it.

The threat actors use these drivers to disable endpoint security products and limit the defenders' visibility and prevention capabilities, laying the ground for subsequent phases of their operation on the targeted networks.

Upon startup, the driver decrypts a hard-coded string of targeted security products and patches the target drivers at hard-coded offsets.

The injected malware routine ensures that the security software drivers still appear to be functioning normally even though they no longer protect the computer.

Crowdstrike says 'Scattered Spider' has a very narrow and specific targeting scope but warns that no organizations can afford to ignore the possibility of BYOVD attacks.

Recently, we reported on other high-profile threat actors, such as the [BlackByte ransomware gang](#) and the [North Korean hacking group Lazarus](#) utilizing BYOVD attacks to power their intrusions with elevated Windows privileges.

A long-standing Windows problem

Microsoft tried to fix this known security problem on Windows by introducing [a blocklist](#) in 2021.

However, the issue wasn't addressed decisively, as Windows does not block these drivers by default unless you run Windows 11 2022 and later, which came out in September 2022.

Even worse, as [ArsTechnica reported](#) in October, Microsoft only updated the driver block list on every major release of Windows, leaving devices vulnerable to these types of attacks. Microsoft [has since released updates](#) that fix this servicing pipeline to update the driver block list properly.

Microsoft recommends that Windows users enable the driver blocklist to protect against these BYOVD attacks. This [support article](#) provides information on enabling the blocklist using the Windows Memory Integrity feature or Windows Defender Application Control (WDAC).

Unfortunately, enabling Memory Integrity on devices that may not have newer drivers can be difficult.

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HEADLINE	01/11 FBI hacked darkweb ISIS site?
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/z34dx3/fbi-wont-say-hacked-dark-web-isis-site-nit
GIST	<p>U.S. government lawyers are hampering efforts that could reveal how the FBI managed to obtain the real IP address of an alleged visitor to an ISIS website on the dark web, according to court records reviewed by Motherboard.</p> <p>The case involves Muhammed Momtaz Al-Azhari, who was charged in May 2020 with attempting to provide material support to ISIS. According to the complaint against him, Al-Azhari allegedly visited a dark web site that hosts “unofficial propaganda and photographs related to ISIS” multiple times on May 14, 2019. In virtue of being a dark web site—that is, one hosted on the Tor anonymity network—it should</p>

have been difficult for the site owner's or a third party to determine the real IP address of any of the site's visitors.

Yet, that's exactly what the FBI did. It found Al-Azhari allegedly visited the site from an IP address associated with Al-Azhari's grandmother's house in Riverside, California. The FBI also found what specific pages Al-Azhari visited, including a section on donating Bitcoin; another focused on military operations conducted by ISIS fighters in Iraq, Syria, and Nigeria; and another page that provided links to material from ISIS's media arm. Without the FBI deploying some form of surveillance technique, or Al-Azhari using another method to visit the site which exposed their IP address, this should not have been possible.

Now, in a recent series of filings, Department of Justice lawyers won't say how the agency accessed Al-Azhari's IP address, and are blocking discussion of the issue from entering the public docket.

"In discovery, the Government has declined to provide any information related to its TOR operation," Samuel E. Landes, the defense attorney working on the case, wrote in a filing published Tuesday.

The news highlights the Department of Justice's continued and intense secrecy about its use of hacking tools, despite them becoming [more popular in a wide range of types of criminal investigations](#). The knock-on effects of that secrecy can be that defendants do not have access to details of how they were identified, and don't have an opportunity to effectively challenge its legal basis. In some cases, prosecutors have also lost chances of convictions because keeping the tools secret was deemed more important than winning a case.

In the motion filed Tuesday, Landes writes that government prosecutors have successfully demanded his motion to compel for more information be marked as a "highly sensitive document." That designation is used for documents that may be of interest to the intelligence service of a hostile foreign government, and use of which by the foreign government would likely cause significant harm, Landes filing says. Landes' latest filing is a subsequent motion asking the court to reconsider giving that designation to his earlier motion.

Landes points to how the FBI's use of network investigative techniques (NITS)—the DOJ's euphemism for hacking tools—is far from a secret, having been used in multiple cases over the years. He says he also found an exhibit filed in other cases with similar issues and is widely available on the internet. Despite the public availability of this information, the government asked the court to treat the motion to compel as a highly sensitive document, Landes writes.

The Department of Justice declined to comment.

In other cases, the DOJ has decided to stop pursuing convictions altogether rather than provide defendants with more information on how they were identified. In 2015 the FBI took over, and [hacked thousands of visitors to, a dark web child abuse site](#). While the operation did ultimately secure many convictions, prosecutors refused to abide by [an order from the court](#) to provide the defense team with the NIT exploit code. The judge [threw out the evidence in response](#), killing the case. The NIT was based on [a "non-public" vulnerability](#).

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HEADLINE	01/11 Police app exposed raids, suspects details
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/sweepwizard-police-raids-data-exposure/
GIST	LAST SEPTEMBER , LAW enforcement agents from five counties in Southern California coordinated an operation to investigate, raid, and arrest more than 600 suspected sex offenders. The mission, Operation Protect the Innocent , was one of the largest such raids in years, involving over 64 agencies. According to the Los Angeles Police Department, it was coordinated using a free trial of an app called SweepWizard.

The raid was hailed as a success by Chief Michael Moore of the LAPD at a press conference the following week. But there was a problem: Unbeknownst to police, SweepWizard had been leaking a trove of confidential details about the operation to the open internet.

The data, which the LAPD and partners in the regional Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force uploaded to SweepWizard, included private information about the suspects as well as sensitive details that, in the wrong hands, could tip off suspects as to when they were going to be raided and cast suspicion on people who had not yet been convicted of any crime.

The SweepWizard app, built by a company called ODIN Intelligence, is meant to help police manage multi-agency raids. But WIRED found that it didn't just expose data from Operation Protect the Innocent; it had already leaked confidential details about hundreds of sweeps from dozens of departments over multiple years. The data included personally identifying information about hundreds of officers and thousands of suspects, such as geographic coordinates of suspects' homes and the time and location of raids, demographic and contact information, and occasionally even suspects' Social Security numbers. All this data was likely exposed due to a simple misconfiguration in the app, according to security experts.

The Los Angeles Police Department said it was unaware of the problem until WIRED reached out for comment. In a phone call, Captain Jeffery Bratcher, commanding officer of the LAPD Juvenile Division and project director for the ICAC Task Force, said the department is concerned and is taking the matter seriously. "Operational security is always paramount to us. We don't want people to know when and if we are coming," he says.

In a separate statement, Captain Kelly Muniz of the LAPD's Media Relations Division, said the department has suspended the use of SweepWizard until a thorough investigation is complete. According to their statement, "the department is working with federal law enforcement to determine the source of the unauthorized release of information, which is currently unclear. At this point in the investigation, it has not been determined if the third-party application or another means is the source of the unauthorized release."

The exposed data contained the location and names of 5,770 suspects, mostly located in California. In some instances, the data included their height, weight, and eye color and indicated whether they were experiencing homelessness. For more than 1,000 of these suspects, SweepWizard also exposed their Social Security numbers.

According to the data, several of these suspects were juveniles at the time of the sweeps. Arrest records and press releases confirm that several people whose names appeared in the leaked data were arrested after the raid.

SweepWizard also appeared to have revealed the names, phone numbers, and email addresses of hundreds of law enforcement officers, as well as the operational details of nearly 200 sweeps. These details included the exact date and time of the sweep, the organizing officers, as well as information like where the pre-sweep briefings were to occur.

After verifying the data exposure, WIRED notified ODIN Intelligence, which quickly took down the app and began an investigation. After declining an interview, Erik McCauley, the CEO and founder of the company, said in a statement, "ODIN Intelligence Inc. takes security very seriously. We have and are thoroughly investigating these claims." He added, "Thus far, we have been unable to reproduce the alleged security compromise to any ODIN system. In the event that any evidence of a compromise of ODIN or SweepWizard security has occurred, we will take appropriate action." McCauley did not respond to specific questions about the issue.

At the time of publication, SweepWizard's website is no longer accessible, and the app has been removed from Google Play and Apple's App Store.

WIRED received a tip that there was a flaw in SweepWizard's application programming interface, or API, that allowed anyone with a specific URL to retrieve confidential law enforcement data from the app.

WIRED downloaded the Android version of the app from Google Play and verified that its API endpoints were in fact returning data regardless of authentication—in other words, you didn’t need to be logged in to the app to view sensitive data about years’ worth of raids and other police operations. The data could be viewed in any web browser simply by visiting a SweepWizard URL.

While the SweepWizard mobile app first launched in 2016, according to app store information, WIRED found data from sweeps going back to 2011, including more than 20 sweeps on Halloween over the years with names like Operation Boo, Operation Hocus Pocus, and Halloween Havoc. (Archived versions of the SweepWizard website date back to 2011.) The most recent data WIRED reviewed includes sensitive information about raids that took place on December 19, 2022.

It’s unclear whether all SweepWizard data was exposed ahead of scheduled raids, and ODIN Intelligence did not respond to specific questions about when the data may have been publicly accessible. However, while confirming the API vulnerability, WIRED observed that data from at least one scheduled sweep had been made public. It is also unclear whether anyone used the data SweepWizard leaked to the open web for nefarious purposes.

ODIN Intelligence advertises itself as a company that develops high-tech solutions for law enforcement that “enable our communities to be safer, better informed, more organized, and crime free.” On its website, the company claims to partner with organizations like the International Association of Chiefs of Police (details of these partnerships are not available). The IACP did not respond to a request for comment. ODIN also created a product called the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which according to a [brochure reviewed by Vice](#), uses face recognition to identify people experiencing homelessness.

The company claims that its products are built by experts and secured with “state-of-the-art” security that adheres to the [FBI’s Criminal Justice Information Services \(CJIS\) security policy for handling sensitive information](#). The FBI did not comment on SweepWizard’s claims of CJIS compliance. However, [a policy document](#) the agency shared with WIRED indicates that SweepWizard was likely not compliant with specific access requirements that specify who can access law enforcement information. ODIN Intelligence’s McCauley did not respond to specific questions about whether SweepWizard was CJIS-compliant.

The Yolo County District Attorney’s Office confirmed that, like the LAPD, it had used a free trial of SweepWizard during an annual sex offender sweep last November, details of which WIRED found in the exposed data. In its statement, chief deputy district attorney Jonathan Raven said that ODIN provided Yolo County with documents that explicitly stated its technology was CJIS-compliant. His office is also investigating the matter.

Ken Munro, an ethical hacker and founder of the UK-based security research firm Pen Test Partners, says that based on how we described being able to access SweepWizard data, the error was likely caused by a simple authorization oversight. While SweepWizard was taken down before he had a chance to examine the app, Munro says that, typically, when an individual logs in to a website or app, they are assigned an access token that gets checked by the app every time their device requests data from it. According to Munro, SweepWizard was likely not checking each request for these access tokens and was simply providing data to any device that asked.

“This is a bit of a basic technical oversight,” he says. “These sorts of authorization issues are not often seen in law enforcement.”

McCauley did not comment on how ODIN’s investigation concluded that a compromise had not occurred. However, after WIRED received his statement, we reviewed our methodology and findings about SweepWizard with Zach Edwards, an independent privacy and security researcher. Edwards says that WIRED’s methodology is no different than what any penetration tester would have done. He adds, “They left the front, side, and back doors open.”

HEADLINE	01/11 'The Guardian' confirms ransomware attack
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/media/2023/jan/11/guardian-confirms-it-was-hit-by-ransomware-attack
GIST	<p>The Guardian has confirmed it was hit by a ransomware attack in December and that the personal data of UK staff members has been accessed in the incident.</p> <p>The Guardian Media Group's chief executive, Anna Bateson, and the Guardian's editor-in-chief, Katharine Viner, confirmed the news in an update emailed to staff on Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>They described the incident as a "highly sophisticated cyber-attack involving unauthorised third-party access to parts of our network", most likely triggered by a "phishing" attempt in which the victim is tricked, often via email, into downloading malware.</p> <p>The Guardian said it had no reason to believe the personal data of readers and subscribers had been accessed. It is not believed that the personal data of Guardian US and Guardian Australia staff has been accessed either.</p> <p>The Information Commissioner's Office, the UK's data watchdog, has been informed of the attack, as well as the UK police.</p> <p>However, the message to staff said there had been no evidence of data being exposed online, so the risk of fraud is considered to be low.</p> <p>The attack was detected on 20 December and affected parts of the company's technology infrastructure. Staff, most of whom have been working from home since the attack, have been able to maintain production of a daily newspaper, while online publishing has been unaffected.</p> <p>"We believe this was a criminal ransomware attack, and not the specific targeting of the Guardian as a media organisation," said Bateson and Viner.</p> <p>"These attacks have become more frequent and sophisticated in the past three years, against organisations of all sizes, and kinds, in all countries."</p> <p>They added: "We have seen no evidence that any data has been exposed online thus far and we continue to monitor this very closely."</p> <p>The Guardian has been using external experts to gauge the extent of the attack and to recover its systems.</p> <p>Although the Guardian expects some critical systems to be back up and running "within the next two weeks", a return to office working has been postponed until early February in order to allow IT staff to focus on network and system restoration.</p> <p>According to a government report last year, two in five UK businesses reported cyber security breaches or attacks in the previous 12 months.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Survey: most teens see pornography online
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/teens-porn-online-survey-teenagers-viewing-habits-sexual-content-parents-kids-internet-high-school-middle-school-digital-parenting#
GIST	<p>(TND) — A new survey shows nearly three-quarters of teenagers have watched online pornography.</p> <p>While there are alarming results from the survey, the co-author of the report said there are also encouraging signs for parents.</p>

[Common Sense Media found in a survey](#) of around 1,300 teens between 13 and 17 that 73% had seen online pornography, 44% had watched it on purpose, and 58% had stumbled upon it on accident.

Senior Research Manager Supreet Mann said they were focused on getting a clearer picture of pornography exposure for teens, along with consumption habits and the type of content they are seeing.

“We saw that slightly more than half had seen it by the time they turned 13,” Mann said. “So yeah, suggesting that age of first exposure is younger than maybe we had thought before.”

In fact, 15% said they first saw online pornography when they were 10 or younger.

Common Sense Media says pornography use among youth is understudied, and parents should consider having conversations with teens about pornography the same way they talk about other sensitive topics, such as drug and alcohol use.

Gone are the days of teens hiding pornographic magazines from their parents.

Teens have cellphones and other devices that can connect them to sexually explicit content any time of the day.

One in three teens said they viewed pornography while attending school in person. Nearly half of teens who have viewed pornography during the school day said they watched it on school-owned devices.

The majority, 67%, of the teens who said they had seen pornography said they feel "OK" about the amount of pornography they watch.

Meanwhile, half said they feel guilty or ashamed after watching pornography.

Common Sense Media said there are gender differences in the intentional consumption of pornography, with cisgender boys and LGBTQ+ teens more likely to seek it out.

Nearly 60% of the teens who say they deliberately view pornography also say they consume pornography weekly.

Many of the teens say they've seen violent behavior in pornography, with 52% saying they've seen depictions of rape, choking, or someone in pain.

“That was quite surprising,” Mann said.

She also said teens can be exposed to harmful stereotypes through pornography.

But Mann said there's a “silver lining here.”

“We also asked teen pornography viewers if they felt that pornography accurately portrays sex. And only about a quarter, 27%, agreed with that statement,” she said. “So, while it is that they are oftentimes seeing very violent, stereotypical depictions in pornographic material that they're viewing online, it may be that they're able to in some ways understand that what they're seeing is not a good reflection of reality.”

Mann said teens want parents or trusted adults to talk to them about the realities and risks of pornography, even if those might be uncomfortable conversations.

More teens said they learned a lot about sex from a parent, caregiver or trusted adult (47%) than from pornography (27%).

	“I think that was very encouraging, that for parents who might be sort of afraid of how their teens will respond, opening that door to having these conversations might surprise them, and their teens might be more willing or appreciative of these conversations than they might expect,” Mann said.
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HEADLINE	01/11 Schools social media lawsuit uncertain road
SOURCE	https://fortune.com/2023/01/11/seattle-public-schools-lawsuit-against-big-tech-face-uncertain-legal-road/
GIST	<p>Like the tobacco, oil, gun, opioid and vaping industries before them, the big U.S. social media companies are now facing lawsuits brought by public entities that seek to hold them accountable for a huge societal problem — in their case, the mental health crisis among youth.</p> <p>But the new lawsuits — one by the public school district in Seattle last week, with a second filed by a suburban district on Monday and almost certainly more to come — face an uncertain legal road.</p> <p>The U.S. Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments next month over the extent to which federal law protects the tech industry from such claims when social media algorithms push potentially harmful content.</p> <p>Even if the high court were to clear the way for lawsuits like Seattle’s, the district has a daunting challenge in proving the industry’s liability.</p> <p>And the tech industry insists there are many ways social media’s effects on teen mental health differ from, say, big pharma’s role in pushing opioid addiction.</p> <p>“The underlying argument is that the tech industry is to blame for the emotional state of teenagers, because they made recommendations on content that has caused emotional harm,” said Carl Szabo, vice president and general counsel of the tech industry trade association NetChoice. “It would be absurd to sue Barnes & Noble because an employee recommended a book that caused emotional harm or made a teenager feel bad. But that’s exactly what this lawsuit is doing.”</p> <p>Seattle Public Schools on Friday sued the tech giants behind TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat, alleging they have created a public nuisance by targeting their products to children. The Kent School District south of Seattle followed suit on Monday.</p> <p>The districts blame the companies for worsening mental health and behavioral disorders including anxiety, depression, disordered eating and cyberbullying; making it more difficult to educate students; and forcing schools to take steps such as hiring additional mental health professionals, developing lesson plans about the effects of social media and providing additional training to teachers.</p> <p>“Our students — and young people everywhere — face unprecedented learning and life struggles that are amplified by the negative impacts of increased screen time, unfiltered content, and potentially addictive properties of social media,” Seattle Superintendent Brent Jones said in an emailed statement Tuesday. “We are confident and hopeful that this lawsuit is a significant step toward reversing this trend for our students.”</p> <p>Federal law — Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 — helps protect online companies from liability arising from what third-party users post on their platforms. But the lawsuits argue the provision, which predates all the social media platforms, does not protect the tech giants’ behavior in this case, where their own algorithms promote harmful content.</p> <p>That’s also the issue in <i>Gonzalez v. Google</i>, the parent company of YouTube, set for argument at the Supreme Court on Feb. 21. In that case, the family of an American woman killed in an Islamic State group attack in Paris in 2015 alleges that YouTube’s algorithms aided the terror group’s recruitment.</p> <p>If the high court’s decision makes clear that tech companies can be held liable in such cases, the school districts will still have to show that social media was in fact to blame. Seattle’s lawsuit says that from 2009</p>

to 2019, there was on average a 30% increase in the number of its students who reported feeling “so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row” that they stopped doing some typical activities.

But Szabo pointed out that Seattle’s graduation rates have been on the rise since 2019, during a time when many kids relied on social media to keep in touch with their friends throughout the pandemic. If social media were truly so harmful to the district’s educational efforts, the graduation rate wouldn’t be rising, he suggested.

“The complaint focuses on only how social media harms kids, and there might be evidence of that,” said Eric Goldman, a professor at Santa Clara University School of Law in Silicon Valley. “But there’s also a lot of evidence that social media benefits teenagers and other kids. What we don’t know is what the distress rate would look like without social media. It’s possible the distress rate would be higher, not lower.”

The companies have insisted that they take the safety of their users, especially kids, seriously, and they have introduced tools to make it easier for parents to know whom their children are contacting; made mental health resources, including the new 988 crisis hotline, more prominent; and improved age verification and screen time limits.

“We automatically set teens’ accounts to private when they join Instagram, and we send notifications encouraging them to take regular breaks,” Anitigone Davis, Meta’s global head of safety, said in an emailed statement. “We don’t allow content that promotes suicide, self-harm or eating disorders, and of the content we remove or take action on, we identify over 99% of it before it’s reported to us.”

[Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen](#) revealed internal studies in 2021 showing the company knew Instagram negatively affected teenagers by harming their body images and worsening eating disorders and suicidal thoughts. She alleged the platform prioritized profits over safety and hid its research from investors and the public.

Even if social media benefits some students, that doesn’t erase the serious harm to many others, said Josh Golin, executive director of Fairplay for Kids, a nonprofit working to insulate children from commercialization and marketing.

“The mental health costs to students, the amount of time schools have to spend monitoring and responding to social media drama, is exorbitant,” Golin said. “It is ridiculous that schools are responsible for the damages caused by these social media platforms to young people. Nobody is seeing the kinds of cumulative effects that social media is causing to the extent school districts are.”

Both cases were filed in U.S. District Court in Seattle, but they are based on state public nuisance law — a broad, vaguely defined legal concept whose origins date back at least to 13th century England. In Washington, public nuisance is defined, in part, as “every act unlawfully done and every omission to perform a duty” which “shall annoy, injure or endanger the safety, health, comfort, or repose of any considerable number of persons.”

Most famously, public nuisance claims helped prompt the tobacco industry’s \$246 billion, 25-year settlement with the states in 1998. But public nuisance law also has been at least part of the basis for litigation by state, city, county or tribal governments seeking to hold oil companies responsible for climate change, the gun industry for gun violence, the pharmaceutical industry for the opioid crisis and vaping companies like Juul for teen vaping.

Much of the litigation is ongoing. Juul Labs last month agreed to settle thousands of lawsuits — including 1,400 from school districts, cities and counties — for a reported \$1.2 billion.

The Seattle litigation has the potential to enact massive change, prompting questions about the appropriateness of addressing big societal issues in court rather than through lawmaking. Yet there is little

	<p>risk to the school district because a private law firm filed the complaint on a contingency basis in which the firm is paid only if the case succeeds.</p> <p>Jolina Cuaresma, senior counsel for privacy and tech policy at Common Sense Media, which aims to make media safer for children, said she was thrilled to see a school district make a public nuisance claim against the tech companies.</p> <p>“Folks have become tired waiting for Congress to do something,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Royal Mail impacted by ‘cyber incident’
SOURCE	https://metro.co.uk/2023/01/11/royal-mail-unable-to-send-letters-and-parcels-overseas-after-cyber-incident-18082286/
GIST	<p>Royal Mail has told customers sending parcels abroad it is facing ‘severe service disruption’ due to a cyber incident.</p> <p>A statement said it was temporarily unable to despatch export items including letters and parcels to overseas destinations.</p> <p>Royal Mail said: ‘We have asked customers temporarily to stop submitting any export items into the network while we work hard to resolve the issue.</p> <p>‘Some customers may experience delay or disruption to items already shipped for export.</p> <p>‘Our import operations continue to perform a full service with some minor delays.</p> <p>‘Our teams are working around the clock to resolve this disruption and we will update customers as soon as we have more information.</p> <p>‘We immediately launched an investigation into the incident and we are working with external experts.</p> <p>‘We have reported the incident to our regulators and the relevant security authorities.</p> <p>‘We would like to sincerely apologise to impacted customers for any disruption this incident may be causing.’</p> <p>The firm is temporarily advising customers to hold any export mail while it attempts to resolve the issue.</p> <p>Royal Mail added that it had launched an investigation into the incident, was ‘working with external experts’ and ‘sincerely apologised’ to customers for the disruption.</p> <p>Their import services remain operational, but are experiencing minor delays.</p> <p>It comes after a system failure caused all flights in the US to be grounded earlier today.</p> <p>Passengers were left stranded at airports across the globe as they await further news.</p> <p>Others were stuck on the tarmac when planned departures were suddenly cancelled.</p> <p>More than 3,700 flights were delayed and more than 640 were cancelled earlier in the day.</p> <p>It also comes at a difficult time for Royal Mail, which is currently embroiled in a bitter row over jobs, pay, and conditions with a Union, which resulted in a series of strikes last year.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 FAA software maintenance mistake
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/computer-failure-faa-impact-flights-nationwide/story?id=96358202
GIST	<p>The ground stop and Federal Aviation Administration systems failures Wednesday morning that impacted thousands of flights across the U.S. appear to have been the result of a mistake that occurred during routine scheduled systems maintenance, according to a senior official briefed on the internal review.</p> <p>An engineer “replaced one file with another,” the official said, not realizing the mistake was being made. As the systems began showing problems and ultimately failed, FAA staff feverishly tried to figure out what had gone wrong. The engineer who made the error did not realize what had happened.</p> <p>“It was an honest mistake that cost the country millions,” the official said.</p> <p>Earlier Wednesday, the FAA said normal operations were "resuming gradually" after ordering a nationwide pause on all domestic departures until 9 a.m. on Wednesday morning following a computer failure that has delayed and canceled flights around the country.</p> <p>"The ground stop has been lifted," officials said at about 8:50 a.m. ET. "We continue to look into the cause of the initial problem[.]"</p> <p>Departures were resuming at about 8:15 a.m. ET at two of the nation's busiest hubs -- Newark, New Jersey, and Atlanta -- FAA officials said on Twitter, adding, "We expect departures to resume at other airports at 9 a.m. ET."</p> <p>The affected Notice To all Air Missions, or NOTAM, system is responsible for sending out flight hazards and real time restrictions to pilots, administration officials said earlier.</p> <p>"The FAA is still working to fully restore the Notice to Air Missions system following an outage," said the FAA announcing the temporary grounding of all planes nationwide. "The FAA has ordered airlines to pause all domestic departures until 9 a.m. Eastern Time to allow the agency to validate the integrity of flight and safety information."</p> <p>Had the FAA's new NOTAM system been in place, redundancies would likely have stopped the cascading failures. With the antiquated system in place, there was nothing to stop the outages, the official told ABC News.</p> <p>"At this time, there is no evidence of a cyberattack. The FAA is working diligently to further pinpoint the causes of this issue and take all needed steps to prevent this kind of disruption from happening again," the FAA said in a statement Wednesday night.</p> <p>There were still more than 7,300 delays and 1,100 cancellations midday, according to tracking website Flight Aware.</p> <p>Failures likely due to 'glitch'</p> <p>Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said a full investigation is necessary to prevent any future mishaps.</p> <p>"When there's an issue in the FAA that needs to be looked at, we're gonna own it, same way we asked the airlines to own their companies and operations," Buttigieg said during an appearance on CNN Wednesday.</p> <p>Congressional hearings are expected as is a possible speed-up of system replacement.</p> <p>On what caused the system meltdown, Buttigieg said that overnight there "was an issue with irregularities in the messages that were going out" -- though more needs to be learned on what led to the widespread failure.</p>

"Now we have to understand how this could have happened in the first place. Why the usual redundancies that would stop it from being that disrupted, did not stop it from being disrupted this time, and what the original source of the errors or the corrupted files would have been," he said.

A senior official briefed on the FAA computer problems told ABC News the software issue developed late last night and led to a "cascading" series of IT failures culminating in this morning's disruption. As has been reported, the disruption is confined to the commercial side of aviation.

As of now, the assessment is the failures are the result of a "glitch" and not something intentional. All possibilities are being looked at to ensure that the FAA systems were not breached.

The FAA first reported the system failure on Tuesday, according to an internal memo from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency obtained by ABC News.

Notably, the FAA system that failed is overdue for replacement.

The official compared the current outage to the crisis that crippled Southwest Airlines during the holidays: antiquated software overdue for replacement inside a critical IT network. If one thing goes down, the system can become paralyzed.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre confirmed in a tweet that President Joe Biden had been briefed and said "there is no evidence of a cyberattack at this point."

"I just spoke with Buttigieg," President Joe Biden said addressing the media on the South Lawn of the White House. "They don't know what the cause is. But I was on the phone with him about 10 minutes. I told him report directly to me when they find out. Aircrafts can still land safely, just not take off right now. We don't know what the cause of it is expected to be able to -- in a couple hours we'll have a good sense of what caused it. And we'll respond at that time."

Buttigieg also said there's currently no indication of a cyberattack, but "we also are not going to rule that out until we have a clearer and better understanding of what's taking place."

Republican Sen. Ted Cruz criticized the FAA's management of the system and called for an explanation of issues.

"The flying public deserves safety in the sky," Cruz said in a statement. "The FAA's inability to keep an important safety system up and running is completely unacceptable and just the latest example of dysfunction within the Department of Transportation. The administration needs to explain to Congress what happened, and Congress should enact reforms in this year's FAA reauthorization legislation. This incident also highlights why the public needs a competent, proven leader with substantive aviation experience leading the FAA."

Airlines hit with delays, cancellations

In the wake of the temporary nationwide pause, several airlines confirmed they were experiencing delays and canceling or diverting flights due to the NOTAM system outage.

"We are closely monitoring the situation, which impacts all airlines, and working with the FAA to minimize disruption to our operation and customers," American Airlines said in a statement. "We encourage customers to check aa.com for the latest flight information."

The airline had canceled nearly 400 flights and 850 flights have been delayed as of late Wednesday morning due to the FAA system issue, it said.

United Airlines said it has "temporarily delayed all domestic flights and will issue an update when we learn more from the FAA."

	<p>Southwest Airlines also confirmed it was suffering through delays due to the technical issues at the FAA.</p> <p>"Please check your flight status in the Southwest app or website to watch for any flight status changes," Southwest Airlines said in a statement released early Wednesday morning. "If your flight status changes substantially we will message the day of travel contact listed on your reservation by their preferred contact method."</p> <p>Delta said it "will continue to work with the FAA on strategic delay programs at certain airports throughout the day," with 130 flights canceled and another 30 diverted.</p> <p>"Potential for additional delays and cancels continue," Delta said in a statement.</p> <p>Several airlines are waiving fees to rebook flights due to the FAA issues, including American, Delta and United.</p>
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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	01/11 IS 'Beatle' vanishes from prison system?
SOURCE	https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/us-news/daughter-murdered-aid-workers-anger-28932154
GIST	<p>The daughter of murdered British aid worker David Haines has told of her fury after the Islamic State terrorist who abducted him vanished from the US prison system.</p> <p>Bethany Haines, 24, whose father was beheaded in Syria, has had to seek reassurance from US justice sources that IS "Beatle" Alexandra Kotey was still detained somewhere in America.</p> <p>It came after the Mirror highlighted to victims' relatives that Kotey, 39, is no longer in the custody of the US federal corrections system, Bureau of Prisons.</p> <p>Bethany of Perth had a face-to-face meeting with Kotey last year in which he told her he had abducted her dad and witnessed his torture and murder.</p> <p>Kotey of Paddington, West London, was sent to the notorious Canaan prison in Pennsylvania last August after admitting charges including conspiracy to commit hostage-taking resulting in death and conspiracy to murder.</p> <p>The jihadist accepted a plea deal that included "cooperation requirements", and was rewarded by avoiding the ADX Florence prison known as the "Alcatraz of the Rockies".</p> <p>After hearing he has vanished from the prison system, Bethany said: "I don't want to think he's managed to negotiate his way into easy treatment on the basis of assisting authorities or anything else.</p> <p>"In the past he has been traceable, as we have access to data via the US victim notification scheme, and we at least had the reassurance that he was in a high-security facility.</p> <p>"The last we heard he was in a maximum security jail renowned for violence, and I was fine with that. If he suffers in any way while he's in jail I'm fine with that, given what he did to my father. I just don't think it's right he can disappear from the system and the families whose lives were devastated by his actions are left to wonder where he is."</p> <p>The four "Beatles" – so called by hostages due to their British accents – are believed to have abducted and killed 27 people, targeting humanitarian aid workers. Those killed include David and fellow British volunteer Alan Henning in 2013, and Americans Kayla Mueller and Peter Kassig.</p>

	<p>Kotey agreed to a meeting with Bethany in Virginia last June as part of a deal that would mean he could be transferred to a UK jail after 15 years to serve the rest of his full-life term here.</p> <p>Bethany said: “I am all for prisons rehabilitating offenders, but when I looked into his eyes I realised there will be no rehabilitating a man like that.</p> <p>“He refused to apologise for what he did to my dad. He did make an apology in a roundabout way for the ongoing suffering that my family has to endure, but he couldn’t find it within himself to say he was sorry for kidnapping, torturing and beheading my father.”</p> <p>Bethany believes he is still in the US penal system, “the most likely [explanation] being he is offering assistance to authorities”. She said: “I’m aware of the saying in prison circles that ‘snitches get ditches’ – if that’s the case it will be a situation he brought on himself.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Somalia: al-Shabab funding sources cut
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-gov-t-says-funding-sources-to-al-shabab-shut-down/6913896.html
GIST	<p>The Somali government says it has shut down the financial infrastructure that supports Islamist militant group al-Shabab.</p> <p>Speaking Wednesday to a gathering of Somali diaspora members in Cairo, Somali Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre said his government has closed every known account connected with the militants.</p> <p>“The government has closed down about 250 militant-connected accounts in four banks and also shut down the network and the data services of about 70 mobile phones the militants were using to transfer money,” Hamza said.</p> <p>“This was a major victory and was only possible because of the tips of the Somali citizens and we are in the process of investigating the amount of the frozen money in the closed accounts,” said the prime minister.</p> <p>Hamza said Somali security forces have also arrested individuals carrying money to al-Shabab financial offices.</p> <p>Al-Shabab has funded itself for years by extorting businesses in Mogadishu and collecting taxes in the areas under its control.</p> <p>Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud declared a “total war” against the al-Qaida-linked militants shortly after being elected last year.</p> <p>Working with local clan fighters, the government has claimed multiple military victories against al-Shabab in the past six months, retaking towns and villages in Hirshabelle state that the militants had controlled for years.</p> <p>Hamza said Tuesday that about 2,000 al-Shabab fighters have been killed in military operations conducted by the Somali army, supported by what he called international partners.</p> <p>VOA could not independently verify the government’s claimed death toll.</p> <p>Al-Shabab, meanwhile, has continued its attacks since Mohamud was elected president.</p> <p>On Saturday, it carried out two attacks on government forces in Somalia’s central region of Hiran in two days, killing more than 43 people, including senior military officers.</p> <p>An October twin car bombing in Mogadishu killed at least 120 people.</p>

HEADLINE	01/12 Coordinated attacks kill 14 Mali troops
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/14-malian-soldiers-killed-explosives-multiple-attacks-96384354
GIST	<p>BAMAKO, Mali -- Coordinated attacks by Islamic extremists have killed 14 Malian soldiers and wounded nearly a dozen, the army said.</p> <p>Multiple improvised explosive devices detonated between Dia and Diafarabe villages as well as between Koumara and Macina towns in central Mali, said Col. Souleymane Dembele, the director of public relations for the army, in a statement Wednesday.</p> <p>During the same attacks, which occurred earlier this week, Mali's forces killed more than 30 "terrorists," Dembele said.</p> <p>The West African nation has been riddled with violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group for a decade. Thousands of people have been killed.</p> <p>Mali's ruling junta, which seized power in two coups starting in 2020, has been struggling to beat back the jihadis, especially since French troops pulled out of the country in August amid frayed relations with the junta. France has been in the region since 2013 when it sent in troops to Mali to push back extremists encroaching on the capital, Bamako, but the jihadis have since regrouped.</p> <p>Since December 2021, the junta has been working with Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group, but the Russians have also been unable to stem the violence. In August, 42 soldiers were killed when their military barracks was attacked.</p> <p>"Extremists groups continue to wreak havoc in the Sahelian nation despite the junta's employment of mercenaries to stem the rise of violence. It's clearly not working," said Laith Alkhouri, CEO of Intelonyx Intelligence Advisory, which provides intelligence analysis.</p> <p>"The high casualty count underscores an untiring effort of extremist groups to weaken any remaining resolve of Malian soldiers. If more of these attacks take place, the junta will need to resort to additional security assistance," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Morocco, Spain bust IS extremist cell
SOURCE	https://english.alarabiya.net/News/north-africa/2023/01/11/Morocco-Spain-arrest-three-extremists-in-joint-raids-
GIST	<p>Moroccan and Spanish authorities have broken up an extremist cell linked to the ISIS terrorist group and arrested its three members in a joint operation, Morocco's security services said Wednesday.</p> <p>One of the "extremist elements" was arrested by special forces from Morocco's DGST domestic intelligence agency in the rural southern region of Chtouka Ait Baha, the country's Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ) said in a statement.</p> <p>Two other members of the cell were arrested by Spanish authorities in Almeria, in the European country's southeast, said the BCIJ, which oversees counter-terrorism operations.</p> <p>Approached by AFP, a police source in Spain confirmed the Moroccan statement but did not give further details.</p> <p>The BCIJ said the suspects had pledged allegiance to ISIS and were promoting "extremist ideas for recruitment purposes."</p>

	<p>The suspects had been hoping to carry out “terrorist operations” elsewhere after they were “unable to reach (ISIS) strongholds in the Sahel region,” it said, referring to a vast area south of the Sahara.</p> <p>However, they had been in contact with fighters in the Sahel charged with helping new recruits join ISIS, the BCIJ added.</p> <p>Morocco has been largely spared extremist violence in recent years, but authorities regularly announce arrests of suspected ISIS affiliates.</p> <p>Since 2002, the North African kingdom has broken up more than 2,000 “terrorist cells” and detained some 3,500 suspected extremists, according to BCIJ figures.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 IS claims responsibility deadly Kabul attack
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/claims-responsibility-kabul-attack-killed-5-96383254
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan -- The Islamic State group claimed responsibility Thursday for a deadly bombing that killed at least five people near the Foreign Ministry in the Afghan capital the previous day.</p> <p>The bombing was the second major attack in Kabul in 2023 and drew condemnation from the international community.</p> <p>The extremist group said in a statement that a “martyrdom-seeker” it identified as Kheiber al-Qandahari detonated his explosive vest amidst a gathering of ministry employees and guards as they left through the ministry's main gate.</p> <p>There was no immediate response from Afghanistan's Taliban rulers about the IS claim. Kabul police chief spokesman Khalid Zadran said Wednesday that the explosion killed five civilians and that “a number of others were wounded” near the ministry.</p> <p>The IS news outlet Aamaq said the attack coincided with a ministry training course for diplomats.</p> <p>The extremists have increased their assaults since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. Targets have included Taliban patrols and members of the country’s Shiite minority.</p> <p>After Wednesday's attack, more than 40 wounded people were brought to a surgical center in Kabul run by Emergency NGO, a humanitarian organization. Stefano Sozza, Emergency’s director in Afghanistan, said at the time that he expected the number of casualties to rise.</p> <p>The attack drew condemnation from the United Nations and various countries. In a statement Wednesday, Pakistan said it stood in solidarity with Afghans in the fight against militants.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Rising number of attacks on WA power grid
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article270731657.html
GIST	<p>The number of confirmed or suspected attacks affecting the power grid in Washington state had reached a decade-high last year, even before four electrical substations in Pierce County were vandalized on Christmas Day.</p> <p>There were a dozen such cases in the state reported to the Department of Energy through Aug. 31, according to a News Tribune analysis of the most recently available data.</p> <p>It was the most the state had seen in a year since 2012, when 23 confirmed or suspected attacks were reported. There were 29 logged in 2011. The vast majority over that two-year period stemmed from Pierce County, the data showed.</p>

Until last year, annual cases reported in Washington to the DOE lingered in single digits and climbed no higher than eight, which was reached in 2019 and repeated in two successive years, according to the data.

The rise in confirmed or suspected attacks in the state comes as incidents have increased across the nation amid warnings from federal authorities about threats to power grid security.

Experts interviewed for this story did not want to speculate on what could be behind the uptick, but attacks in Washington, Oregon and North Carolina in recent months have pushed grid security to the forefront of the news cycle.

“I think every one of those incidents is a wake-up call,” said Daniel Kirschen, a University of Washington professor in the Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering.

The DOE collects data from the power industry, including utilities, which must submit an Electric Emergency Incident and Disturbance Report following instances of a physical or cyber attack, suspicious activity or other events to its systems, including those related to weather or malfunctions.

The News Tribune reviewed annual reports over the past decade-plus and homed in on event types categorized as “vandalism,” “actual physical attack,” “suspected physical attack,” “suspicious activity” and “sabotage,” among others that indicated human involvement.

The data through eight months of 2022 in Washington showed nine instances of a physical attack or vandalism, two instances of suspicious activity and a “cyber event.”

In three instances, a reported activity spanned multiple western states, including a July 5 physical attack affecting Pierce County. The data indicated that the matter was quickly resolved and no customers were affected.

HARD TO KEEP SAFE

There were 108 confirmed or suspected attacks logged across the United States last year through Aug. 31, the most for any single year since 123 were reported in 2011, according to the data.

Kirschen, whose expertise includes power system security and the electricity grid, said the massive breadth of the interconnected system across the nation made it difficult to protect. The grid maintains roughly 7,000 power plants, millions of miles of power lines and distribution transformers, and 55,000 transmission substations, according to 2016 and 2017 federal data.

“You can’t build enormous walls around all of those substations,” Kirschen said. “So it’s not an easy problem (to solve).”

Federal data shows that Washington is among states particularly at risk for malicious activities to the grid. More confirmed or suspected attacks have been reported in the western United States than anywhere else in the nation since 2011.

Again, experts were unsure of why.

The Western Electricity Coordinating Council, one of six major regional entities of the nonprofit North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), has seen 443 of 952, or 46%, of total reported cases between 2011 and August, according to The News Tribune’s analysis. The WECC region includes Washington, 10 other western states and western Canada.

“I think the threats are continuing to evolve, but we do have robust plans in place for each of those types of events that enable utilities more often than not to respond quickly and effectively,” said Adrienne Lotto, the senior vice president of Grid Security, Technical & Operations Services for the American Public Power Association.

Lotto added that oftentimes, there is no effect on utility customers.

“I think that’s important to note,” she said. “But I also think it’s equally important to note that the utilities do take it seriously.”

INCREASED SECURITY MEASURES

After the attacks in Pierce County, the two targeted companies — Tacoma Public Utilities and Puget Sound Energy — assured that security was of utmost importance. TPU spokesperson Rebekah Anderson said the company had increased security measures amid warnings from federal authorities and, again, following the vandalism at its two substations.

The American Public Power Association, which represents about 1,400 public power utilities, including TPU, pushed out a version of its physical security guide to members last year and will send an updated copy later in 2023, according to Lotto.

She said the industry is collaborative on sharing resources to fight risks.

Meanwhile, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, an independent agency which regulates electric transmission in the United States, has directed NERC to review the current physical security requirements for the grid in the wake of recent attacks, Lotto said.

Michael Mabee is an Army veteran whose research on electric grid disturbances and DOE data since 2011 has been cited on NPR, CBS News and 60 Minutes. Mabee cautioned that the DOE’s data was poorly kept and deficient in updating incident impacts to customers, thus making it difficult to analyze.

He questioned whether there would be any progress in better safeguarding the grid.

“This physical security problem, we’ve known about it for decades,” he said. “We’ve failed to fix it.”

Mabee said the surest path forward was pressuring Congress to ensure that physical security requirements were not lacking for the majority of grid assets, which he claimed was currently the case.

DESPERATION OR AN ACT OF TERRORISM?

The Associated Press reported on a Department of Homeland Security bulletin issued a year ago that warned of domestic terrorists with “a range of ideologies” threatening to attack the grid since at least 2020. Federal authorities also cautioned that extremist groups who seek to engage in mass violence to collapse society could be targeting the grid. The AP noted that white supremacist and anti-government groups have been linked to plotting attacks.

On Jan. 3, the Department of Justice announced that two Puyallup men were arrested for allegedly vandalizing the Pierce County substations, following a “fast-moving investigation by the FBI.” The vandalism caused at least \$3 million in damages, authorities said. The two targeted utility companies said the incidents damaged equipment and knocked out power for roughly 30,000 customers, including in Graham and Elk Plain.

Matthew Greenwood, 32, and Jeremy Crahan, 40, were charged with conspiracy to damage energy facilities and possession of an unregistered firearm, according to the DOJ. An unsealed criminal complaint revealed that one suspect reportedly told authorities that the attacks were intended to aid a burglary at a nearby business.

Greenwood and Crahan allegedly broke into a local business affected by the subsequent outage and stole the cash register, the charging document shows. On Friday, Greenwood’s girlfriend told The News Tribune that the couple were “desperate to get on our feet” and care for their baby.

Assistant U.S. attorney Stephen Hobbs had described the men’s alleged actions as “a crime of terrorism.”

For Mabee, the attack illustrated the susceptibility of the power infrastructure, regardless of the perpetrator's motives.

"It takes relatively no sophistication to do a coordinated attack against the U.S. electric system," he said.

VANDALISM OFTEN CITED, BUT OUTAGES RARE

Since 2011, there have been at least 112 confirmed or suspected attacks affecting the power grid in Washington, according to federal data, excluding activity during the last four months of 2022. In the majority of instances, there was no reported effect on customers or the impact was unknown.

At least 57 of those incidents have hit Pierce County — a figure buoyed by the large number of cases in 2011 and 2012, federal data showed. Since then, the county has been affected by nine incidents through Aug. 31, including the one in July.

That figure could be higher because the data in some instances associates an incident with "Washington" but does not specify the affected area within the state.

The federal data does not include the vandalism at four substations last month.

Those attacks on Christmas Day, if grouped together, interrupted power for more customers in the state than any other reported attack since at least 2011 in instances where the impact was reported, according to federal data.

"We have seen attacks such as these increase in Western Washington and throughout the country and must treat each incident seriously," U.S. Attorney Nick Brown said in a statement Jan. 3.

Reported power disruptions from vandalism and theft are uncommon in the state. There were eight such incidents in Washington between 2008 and 2017 that resulted in a power outage, according to a state energy sector risk profile produced by the DOE in 2021.

But vandalism to the power grid has been the most frequently reported type of confirmed or suspected attack affecting the power grid in Washington since 2011.

There have been at least 67 vandalism incidents in the state over the last decade-plus, as well as 24 suspected physical attacks that were unspecified and nine reports of suspicious activity, the data showed. Only two incidents were described as related to cybersecurity.

TPU suffered two other incidents of vandalism last year, according to spokesperson Jessica Wilson. Both were after Aug. 31, and thus would not yet be included in federal data. One instance occurred in the Elk Plain area on Oct. 3 and another in South Tacoma on Nov. 29, according to Wilson.

The utility also saw dozens of unplanned outages attributed to human involvement in 2022 that it did not classify as intentional or unintentional, she said.

They included 61 car crashes that involved a power line, seven cases of tree branches falling on lines, six cases of balloons being caught in lines, two cases of people digging into buried lines, and 14 incidents that covered "other" events, such as brush fires or human error.

Wilson did not have any details on whether any of those incidents led to investigations into potential criminal activity and she deferred to law enforcement.

The federal data also does not provide information about the potential criminal aspects of incidents reported to the DOE, including whether they resulted in arrests or charges. But to experts, each one is alarming.

"If these attacks multiply," Kirschen said, "this could be really terrible."

Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/11 UN: large dams lose 25% capacity by 2050
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/11/worlds-large-dams-could-lose-quarter-of-capacity-by-2050-says-un
GIST	<p>Thousands of the world's large dams are so clogged with sediment that they risk losing more than a quarter of their storage capacity by 2050, UN researchers have concluded, warning of the threat to water security.</p> <p>A new study from the UN University's Institute for Water, Environment and Health found that, by mid-century, dams and reservoirs will lose about 1.65tr cubic metres of water storage capacity to sediment.</p> <p>The figure is close to the combined annual water use of India, China, Indonesia, France and Canada.</p> <p>That is important, the researchers say, because these big dams are a key source of hydroelectricity, flood control, irrigation and drinking water throughout the world.</p> <p>"Global water storage is going to diminish – it is diminishing now – and that needs to be seriously taken into account," the study's co-author and institute director, Vladimir Smakhtin, told AFP.</p> <p>Researchers looked at nearly 50,000 large dams in 150 countries, and found that they have already lost about 16% of water storage capacity.</p> <p>They estimated that if buildup rates continue at the same pace, that will increase to about 26% by mid-century.</p> <p>Rivers naturally wash sediment downstream to wetlands and coasts, but dams disrupt this flow and over time the buildup of these muddy deposits gradually reduces the space for water.</p> <p>Smakhtin said this "endangers the sustainability of future water supplies for many", as well as posing risks to irrigation and power generation.</p> <p>Accumulation of sediment can also cause flooding upstream and impact wildlife habitats and coastal populations downstream.</p> <p>Sedimentation is a part of a larger issue: by 2050, tens of thousands of large dams will be near or past their intended lifespan.</p> <p>Most of the world's 60,000 big dams – constructed between 1930 and 1970 – were designed to last 50 to 100 years, after which they risk failure, affecting more than half the global population who will live downstream.</p> <p>Large dams and reservoirs are defined as higher than 15 metres (49 ft), or at least five metres high while holding back no less than 3m cubic metres of water.</p> <p>Global warming compounds the risk in ways that have yet to be fully measured.</p> <p>"Climate change extremes like floods and droughts will increase, and higher intensity showers are more erosive," Smakhtin said.</p>

	<p>This not only increases the risk of reservoirs overflowing but also accelerates the buildup of sediment, which affects dam safety, reduces water storage capacity and lowers energy production in hydroelectric dams.</p> <p>To address looming challenges of ageing dams and reservoir sedimentation, the study authors list several measures.</p> <p>Bypass, or sediment diversion, can divert water flow downstream through a separate river channel.</p> <p>Another strategy is the removal, or “decommissioning”, of a dam to re-establish the natural flow of sediment in a river.</p> <p>But addressing water storage issues is especially complex because there is no one-size-fits-all solution, Smakhtin said.</p> <p>“The loss of water storage is inevitable for different reasons,” Smakhtin said. “So the question we should be asking is what are the alternatives?”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Heathrow: uranium embedded in metal bars
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/11/heathrow-uranium-seizure-raises-questions-over-what-it-was-for
GIST	<p>A discovery of metal bars embedded with uranium at Heathrow in late December has triggered an urgent counter-terrorism investigation, in an attempt to establish why it was concealed in an aeroplane shipment.</p> <p>Scotland Yard said on Tuesday night the amount of contaminated material was “extremely small” and posed “no threat to the public” although some reports had suggested, incorrectly, that several kilograms of uranium itself were discovered.</p> <p>The absence of danger was emphasised by multiple sources on Wednesday morning, although the way in which the uranium was discovered “in kilo bars” has raised questions whether there was a deliberate effort to conceal the presence of the radioactive element.</p> <p>Found by Border Force staff at Heathrow airport, the uranium was contained in a package of scrap metal that originally came from Pakistan and had come to the UK via a passenger flight from Oman on 29 December. It was bound for an Iranian business with premises in the UK.</p> <p>Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, the former head of the British army’s chemical weapons unit, said he believed only trace amounts of uranium had been discovered and that it was unclear – “a million-dollar question” – what it could have been for.</p> <p>But the weapons expert said the public should not be concerned, not least because it was detected once it had arrived in the UK. “The system worked,” he added.</p> <p>Iran has been enriching uranium to 60% at two sites in the country, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, but denies any plan to develop a bomb, which requires uranium to be 90% enriched.</p> <p>Tehran also remains in long-running talks to restart an agreement in which it would curb its nuclear activities in return for sanctions relief, but concerns about the country’s support for Russia make it unclear if a deal can be struck.</p> <p>Uranium is used as fuel in nuclear power stations and can be used for “dirty bombs” – munitions with a radioactive element – and certain types of nuclear weapons. But the Metropolitan police said its discovery did not appear to be linked with any active plot.</p>

	<p>“I want to reassure the public that the amount of contaminated material was extremely small and has been assessed by experts as posing no threat to the public,” said Commander Richard Smith of the Met.</p> <p>“Although our investigation remains ongoing, from our inquiries so far it does not appear to be linked to any direct threat. As the public would expect, however, we will continue to follow up on all available lines of inquiry to ensure this is definitely the case.”</p> <p>A Met spokesperson added: “We can confirm officers from the Met’s counter-terrorism command were contacted by Border Force colleagues at Heathrow after a very small amount of contaminated material was identified after routine screening within a package incoming to the UK on 29 December 2022.”</p> <p>It is understood that the Home Office does not believe there is any threat to the public. A Home Office spokesperson said: “We do not comment on live investigations.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 World record: largest loss personal fortune
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jan/12/elon-musk-breaks-world-record-for-largest-loss-of-personal-fortune-in-history
GIST	<p>Elon Musk has broken the world record for the largest loss of personal fortune in history, according to a Guinness World Records report.</p> <p>The tech billionaire has lost approximately \$182bn (£150bn) since November 2021, although other sources suggest that it could actually be closer to \$200bn, the report said.</p> <p>“Musk’s net worth dropped from a peak of \$320bn in 2021 to \$138bn as of January 2023, largely due to the poor performance of Tesla’s stock,” the global records database said, citing figures obtained from Forbes.</p> <p>Although the report concedes the exact figure is “almost impossible to ascertain”, it noted that Musk’s total losses “far surpass” the previous record of \$58.6bn (£47bn), set by Japanese tech investor Masayoshi Son in 2000.</p> <p>In December, the Tesla boss lost his position as richest person in the world to Bernard Arnault, the chief executive of French luxury goods conglomerate LVMH, which owns fashion label Louis Vuitton.</p> <p>Forbes estimates as of 12 January put Arnault’s net worth at \$203.7bn (£168bn) and Musk’s at \$146.5bn (£121bn).</p> <p>The majority of Musk’s fortune is tied up in Tesla stock, the value of which plummeted 65% in a tumultuous 2022, the Guinness World Records report said.</p> <p>The decline accelerated in October after Musk bought Twitter for roughly \$44bn (£36bn), it said.</p> <p>Growing worries about weakening demand and logistical problems have hampered deliveries for the world’s most valuable automaker.</p> <p>As the market closed for the year on 30 December 2022, Musk tweeted: “Long-term fundamentals are extremely strong. Short-term market madness is unpredictable.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Whale sightings rise across Salish Sea
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/whale-sightings-rise-across-salish-sea/KLCWXFG6PFG3ZF5GM7BO6O66KY/

Wednesday morning revealed some interesting news regarding our environment and the health of whale populations.

According to the Pacific Whale Watch Association and other local research organizations, 2022 was a record year for sightings of Bigg's killer whales as well as humpback whales. The PWWA operates year-round whale-watching tours in and around the Salish Sea.

PWWA Executive Director Erin Gless explained why the sightings are up.

"The explanation is actually pretty simple. The reason we're seeing so much success now with species like the Bigg's killer whales and humpback whales is because we stopped hunting them, or hunting the things they eat," said Gless.

PWWA experts said that Bigg's killer whales and humpback whales were the most frequently documented whales in 2022. Different groups reported 1,221 unique sightings of Bigg's killer whales throughout the Salish Sea.

Last year, gray whales were reported by the group on 200 days, and Minke whales on 158 days.

The group says the salmon-eating Southern Resident killer whale population remains endangered and is rarely encountered by professional whale watchers.

Bigg's killer whales feed on marine mammals and have been increasing steadily for the past decade.

Gless said while orcas are common across our region, humpback whales were not until conditions changed.

"We are a big humpback whale buffet here. So, we here in the Salish Sea are unique in that we get a mixture of humpback whales from many different parts of the world. We get them from Hawaii, we get them from Mexico, we even get some humpback whales that come all the way from Central America," said Gless.

Researchers with the Canadian Pacific Humpback Collaboration said that 396 individual humpback whales were photographed in the Salish Sea last year. That's the highest number in a single year in the past 100 years. The figure includes a record-breaking 34 mothers with calves who traveled from their tropical birthing grounds.

The PWWA says the previous record of 21 humpback calves was set in 2021. Humpback whales, according to the whale watching group, are another success story, growing in number since protective measures were put in place in the 1960s.

The PWWA clarified that a "unique sighting" is a sighting of a specific group of whales on a single day and does not include repeat reports of the same whales on the same day. That number is 154 sightings more than the 2021 record, and double the number of Bigg's sightings five years ago in 2017. During 2022, the PWWA reported a single-day record with more than 70 Bigg's killer whales spread in area waters from Hood Canal in Washington to Vancouver Island's Campbell River region in British Columbia.

Bigg's killer whales were formerly called "transient" killer whales because they were seen infrequently decades ago. Their growing presence has prompted the research and whale-watching communities to change the name to Bigg's killer whales, after pioneering killer whale researcher Dr. Michael Bigg.

"When Bigg's were first studied in the Salish Sea, it was just after the implementation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act," said Orca Behavior Institute Director Monika Wieland Shields. "In the decades since, seals, sea lions, and porpoises have all recovered in spectacular fashion. The Salish Sea can now support many more killer whales than it used to, and clearly, word has spread."

	“2022 was a memorable year full of record sightings and dozens of new calves,” Gless said. “Twenty years ago, it was rare to see humpbacks or Bigg’s killer whales in the Salish Sea. Now, we see them almost every day. It really demonstrates what’s possible if animals have an ample food supply.”
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	01/11 Report: 64 police officers fatally shot 2022
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/64-police-officers-fatally-shot-while-on-the-job-in-2022/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — Far fewer U.S. police officers died while on the job in 2022 than a year earlier, due mostly to a drop in COVID-19 deaths, though the number killed by gunfire remained relatively high, according to a report released Wednesday.</p> <p>Sixty-four of the 226 officers who died in the line of duty last year were fatally shot, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund said. That matched the death-by-gunfire tally from 2021, with the shooting death figures from both years reflecting an increase in the average annual fatality toll over the past decade and an indication of a disturbing trend, said Bill Alexander, executive director of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington.</p> <p>“We really do have some concerns about these numbers specific to firearms fatalities,” Alexander said. From 2010 to 2020, by comparison, 53 officers on average were killed by gunfire each year.</p> <p>The country has seen an overall rise in violent crime in recent years, especially from gun violence. The exact causes are hard to pinpoint, but experts say potential factors include the pandemic, which has killed more than 1 million people in the U.S., as well as civil unrest and fears about the economy.</p> <p>The overall number of police deaths dropped in 2022 by 61% from an all-time high of 586 a year earlier, as reduced coronavirus infection rates and widespread availability of vaccines meant fewer officers died from COVID.</p> <p>The organization tallies COVID-19 deaths from officers infected with the virus in the line of duty. The virus remained the No. 1 killer of police last year.</p> <p>There was also an increase in fatalities related to vehicle crashes. Forty officers died in traffic crashes last year, an increase of nearly 30% from 2021.</p> <p>Texas had the overall largest number of deaths in the line of duty with 33, followed by New York with 12. California and Georgia each had 11.</p> <p>The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund is a private nonprofit in Washington that built and maintains the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial monument, as well as a database of officer deaths dating to 1786. The data in its yearend reports come from federal, state, tribal and local law enforcement agencies.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Arrests: suspect's own social media posts
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/robbery-suspects-arrested-charged-after-incriminating-social-media-posts/GIIZICWREBDXPAWFDIWDUQGZAA/
GIST	<p>BURIEN, Wash. — Violent robbery after robbery — stretching from Seattle to the Eastside to South King County. Now two men have been charged with nearly a dozen crimes.</p> <p>The two suspects are 22-year-old Ricardo Valencia-Alvarez and 21-year-old Cesar Sandoval.</p>

Court documents say at least part of what led to their arrest are posts about a crime that the suspects shared on social media, with one video showing the bullet holes in a stolen vehicle after a store employee opened fire. The robbery events are detailed over 96 pages of documents, with images from surveillance videos that span many crime scenes.

One incident happened at a Shell gas station in Burien on Dec. 4. Documents say an employee shot at the suspects, damaging the getaway vehicle. That damage ended up playing a big role in helping catch the suspects.

“I was filling the store order for the week, (a) car pulls up, guys come in with a gun, point the gun at me,” said Billy, who was working at the time.

Video shows the suspects marching him to the registers and forcing him to take out cash.

As the suspects try to leave, he takes action.

“They got money, they walked out, I fired at their vehicle,” he said.

Video shows the employee firing more than ten shots.

“They drove away very fast with the door open,” Billy said.

Court documents say earlier that night, the same suspects robbed a 7-Eleven in West Seattle. Surveillance video from that store shows a suspect wearing the same red face mask.

In fact, Sandoval and Alvarez are also charged with robbing businesses and people in Renton, Bellevue, Redmond, Kent, Mercer Island and Seattle.

“It’s pretty heartbreaking this is even happening,” said John Shimabukuro, a King County resident. “I live in Redmond, so you kind of feel like you’re safer there. But yeah, it’s been happening everywhere,” he said.

But after the Burien incident, court documents say Alvarez “boasts on social media about committing robberies,” sharing a Facebook video of the getaway car, captioning it “Fat shoot out.”

In another photo, you can count eight bullet holes on the car.

“They pretty much admitted it to themselves online,” Billy said. “I laughed.”

With a search warrant at Sandoval’s residence in Seattle, police recovered this two-toned handgun that investigators believe was used in robberies in Renton, Bellevue and Seattle. They also recovered distinct pants that matched ones worn in Bellevue and Redmond.

Investigators say Alvarez also sent multiple Facebook messages about the robberies, at times asking others to join in.

Documents show he wrote, “you down to come with me and my cousin ... we finna run up in gas stations and stick em up.”

Prosecutors asked for Sandoval to be held on \$1 million bail and Alvarez to be held on \$750,000 bail.

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HEADLINE	01/11 Seattle faces more EV charger cable thefts
SOURCE	https://westseattleblog.com/2023/01/west-seattle-crime-watch-theft-puts-second-city-owned-ev-charger-out-of-service-stolen-car-suspect-arrested/

GIST	<p>THIEVES SHUT DOWN ANOTHER CHARGER: Thanks for the tips. Seattle City Light confirms that both of its electric-vehicle chargers on 39th SW are out of service because of theft. One charger's cable was cut/stolen in November; now the same thing has happened to the other charger. And SCL's Jenn Strang told WSB today the charger hit first was hit again last month: "The cables on the northern station at Alaska Junction were stolen in November and December and cables on the southern station were stolen between January 9th and 10th. Given that all cables have been lost at the Alaska Junction location, City Light was unfortunately forced to set these stations to unavailable." So what's the plan now? we asked: "In November, we submitted a request for a full contingent of replacement parts for both stations and still await delivery from the manufacturer. We are looking at solutions to help mitigate this issue moving forward, while also attempting to source replacement and back up parts to minimize downtime impacting our customers." We also asked how widespread the problem is; Strang replied, "City Light has had cables stolen from 8 chargers in the last year, and we are seeing similar impacts to other public charging providers."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Baltimore fentanyl organizations shuttered
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/law-enforcement-and-public-safety/baltimore-fentanyl-organizations-shut-down-by-federal-indictments/
GIST	<p>Two Baltimore-based drug trafficking organizations that supplied large amounts of fentanyl to West Virginia and caused at least two deaths have been dismantled by separate federal indictments that were unsealed today.</p> <p>Thirty-four people from Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia were indicted on charges related to the sale of fentanyl, heroin and other drugs in Hampshire County and Mineral County. The drugs distributed led to a spike in overdoses in the region, both fatal and non-fatal. Much of the fentanyl had high levels of purity and had a purple tint to distinguish it from drugs sold by competitors.</p> <p>In the first indictment, Kentrel Anthony Rollins, also known as "T-Rock," age 30, of Baltimore, Maryland is alleged to be the leader of a fentanyl distribution operation in Hampshire County and elsewhere from January 2020 to October 2021. Court documents show that in addition to the sale of drugs, there was firearms trafficking and the trading of guns for drugs. Many of the firearms were acquired by a straw purchaser on behalf of the organization. Twelve people are charged in this matter, which also includes the alleged trafficking of heroin, methamphetamine and cocaine.</p> <p>In the second indictment, Sean Jarred Davis, age 31, also of Baltimore, is alleged to be the leader of a conspiracy to distribute more than 40 grams of fentanyl, as well as heroin, in Hampshire County and elsewhere from February 2021 to January 2023. A total of twenty-two individuals are charged in the case. "Fentanyl continues to be the number one threat to public safety in the region and much of it flows here from Baltimore," said United States Attorney William Ihlenfeld. "The investigators are to be commended for their outstanding work in identifying the sources of supply and halting their operations."</p> <p>The Potomac Highlands Drug Task Force, a HIDTA-funded initiative, led the investigations. The Task Force consists of members from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the West Virginia State Police, the Mineral County Sheriff's Office, the Hampshire County Sheriff's Office, the Hardy County Sheriff's Office, the Grant County Sheriff's Office, and the Keyser Police Department. The Hampshire County Prosecutor's Office assisted.</p> <p>Assistant U.S. Attorney Lara Omph-Botteicher is prosecuting the cases on behalf of the government.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/12 Maritime piracy lowest levels in 3 decades
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/maritime-security/maritime-piracy-incidents-at-lowest-level-in-almost-three-decades/

Maritime piracy and armed robbery attacks reached their lowest recorded level in almost three decades in 2022.

The annual report from the International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau has recorded 115 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships in 2022 – compared to 132 in 2021 – with half of them occurring in Southeast Asian waters, particularly in the Singapore Straits, where incidents continue to rise.

Perpetrators were successful in gaining access to vessels in 95% of the reported incidents broken down as 107 vessels boarded, two vessels hijacked, five attempted attacks and one vessel fired upon. In many cases vessels were either anchored or steaming when boarded, with nearly all the incidents occurring during the hours of darkness.

The continued and much needed reduction is attributed to an overall decrease of piratical activity in the highly risky waters of the Gulf of Guinea – down from 35 incidents in 2021 to 19 in 2022. Sustained efforts are however needed to ensure the continued safety of seafarers in the Gulf of Guinea region, which remains dangerous as evidenced by two incidents in the last quarter of 2022.

In mid-November a Ro-Ro vessel was commandeered by pirates, around 28nm SW of Turtle Islands, Sierra Leone. All crew were taken hostage and the pirates tried to navigate the vessel through shallow waters resulting in the vessel running aground. The crew managed to free themselves and took refuge in the citadel until the Sierra Leone authorities boarded the vessel. In mid-December, a Suezmax tanker was also fired upon, 87nm NW of Bata, Equatorial Guinea.

IMB Director Michael Howlett said: “The IMB applauds the prompt and decisive actions of the international navies and regional authorities in the Gulf of Guinea which have positively contributed to the drop in reported incidents and ensuring continued safety to crews and trade. Both these latter incidents do however cause concern and illustrate that efforts to enhance maritime security in the region must be sustained”.

Masters are also strongly encouraged to follow industry Best Management Practice recommendations in these waters.

A third of all incidents reported globally in 2022 have been in the Singapore Straits with underway vessels successfully boarded in all 38 incidents. The majority of vessels boarded were over 50,000 DWT, including six laden vessels over 150,000 DWT. While these are considered low level opportunistic crimes and fall under the definition of armed robbery, crews continue to be at risk. In the 38 reported incidents, two crew were threatened and four were taken hostage for the duration of the incident. It has also been reported that in at least three incidents a gun was used to threaten the crew.

IMB Director Michael Howlett said: “We commend local authorities for investigating nearly all reported incidents. Being one of the most crucial and busy waterways for trade, these incidents continue to be a cause of concern as they not only have an impact on crew safety but also potential navigational and environmental consequences.”

The IMB Piracy Reporting Centre also believes there is a degree of under reporting as well as late reporting of incidents from these waters and encourages Masters to report all incidents as early as possible so that local authorities are able to identify, investigate and apprehend the perpetrators.

Two incidents of armed robbery against ships in the Singapore Straits have already been reported in 2023. The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia reports that the incidents occurred on board barges that were towed by tug boats while underway in the Strait. Scrap metals were stolen from the barges in both incidents, and the crew members were not injured.

Incidents reported in the Indonesian archipelago remain at relatively low levels thanks to the continued efforts of the Indonesian Marine Police.

	Despite a noticeable decrease in the number of reported incidents in Central and South American waters, ports in Brazil, Guyana, Peru, Venezuela, Mexico and Haiti continue to be affected by the crime of armed robbery. The reduction is partially attributed to the decrease in reported incidents in Callao anchorage in Peru which saw a 33% decrease compared to 2021.
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HEADLINE	01/12 Rwanda border security cracks down crime
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/border-security/rwanda-border-security-operation-cracks-down-on-crime/
GIST	<p>Efforts to boost border security in Rwanda through operational training and the enhanced use of INTERPOL policing tools saw thousands of checks carried out against its global databases.</p> <p>The five-day Operation STOP (Smuggling Training and Operations Program) in December aimed to strengthen efforts against cross-border crime by providing capacity building training to 20 participants on tracking the movement of criminals to identify and arrest them and safeguard potential victims via INTERPOL's databases and I-24/7 secure communications channel.</p> <p>Following the training exercise, officers from Customs, Immigration, the Rwanda Investigation Bureau and the INTERPOL National Central Bureau in Kigali were deployed to key border points in the capital and between Rwanda and Uganda.</p> <p>They carried out more than 16,500 checks against INTERPOL's databases, including those for nominal data on suspected criminals, stolen and lost travel documents, and stolen motor vehicles.</p> <p>Extending access to INTERPOL's I-24/7 network and databases at key border points, with mobile technology allowing frontline officers to run instant checks, is central to the STOP initiative.</p> <p>INTERPOL's Director of Operational Support and Analysis, Cyril Gout, said: "Operation STOP is crucial in boosting the ability of officers to tackle crimes such as irregular migration, human trafficking and other cross-border crimes which harm national and regional security. Operational trainings directly enhance the crime-fighting skills of officers which are then put into practice enhances border security."</p> <p>At the heart of the project is the extension of access for police at strategic border points to INTERPOL's secure global police communications network.</p> <p>To this end, Rwandan frontline officers were provided with INTERPOL mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones, allowing them to run checks against INTERPOL's databases and receive an instant response.</p> <p>The STOP initiative helps member countries to protect vulnerable communities in the African region through capacity building, operational support, and the consolidation of global information-sharing platforms, providing a lasting legacy of improved national operational capacity.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/12 EMTs went to help, now charged w/murder
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/01/12/emt-paramedics-murder-springfield-illinois/
GIST	<p>Two paramedics were supposed to help Earl Moore Jr. last month as he endured hallucinations brought on by alcohol withdrawal. Instead, they killed him, authorities said.</p> <p>Police officers were the first to arrive to the house in Springfield, Ill., after receiving a call from a man in distress on Dec. 18. Finding Moore lying in his bed, incoherent but not in immediate danger, they radioed for paramedics to provide medical help. Peggy Finley, 44, and Peter Cadigan, 50, both EMTs with the private company LifeStar Ambulance Service, got there some 15 minutes later, around 2:20 a.m.</p>

After arriving, Finley and Cadigan strapped Moore facedown to a gurney, loaded him into their ambulance and drove him to the hospital.

Less than an hour later, the 35-year-old was dead.

On Tuesday, the Sangamon County prosecutor announced that both EMTs had been charged with first-degree murder. The coroner had declared Moore's death a homicide, determining it was the result of the paramedics strapping him facedown on the gurney and causing him to suffocate through "positional asphyxia." With their training and experience, Finley and Cadigan knew that trapping Moore in a prone position would "create a substantial probability of great bodily harm or death," State's Attorney Dan Wright said Tuesday at a news conference.

They face 20 to 60 years in prison if convicted, he added.

D. Peter Wise, the attorney who represented both EMTs at a bond hearing on Tuesday, told The Washington Post that neither has a criminal history nor are they a danger to others.

"These are two good people that find themselves in a very odd criminal case," Wise said.

LifeStar CEO Roger Campbell declined to comment.

The series of events that led to Moore's death started in the early morning of Dec. 18 when he called 911, according to body-camera footage released by the prosecutors' office.

Three Springfield Police Department officers arrived at 2:05 a.m., the footage shows. A woman who answered the door told the officers she recently started renting the place and immediately said that, despite the information they may have received, no one in her house had guns.

A severe alcoholic who hadn't had a drink in four days, Moore was in the throes of withdrawal, she said. He was hallucinating — both seeing and hearing things that weren't there. But he wasn't violent, she said.

One of the officers asked if she thought he needed assistance.

"I think he needs help, yes," she said.

Three officers entered the house, walking through the living room and kitchen before entering a back room where Moore was lying on a bed. It was 2:07. As ambient music played, one of the officers tried engaging him in conversation without success. About 30 seconds later, the lead officer made the call, hopping on the radio to request an ambulance.

And for the next 11 minutes, the officers waited. Although they kept trying to talk with Moore by asking him to identify the president of the United States or even just himself, they got little out of him, the body-camera footage shows. During that time, Moore rambled, moaned and eventually rolled off the bed.

Then, Finley entered the room.

"This is Earl," the lead officer told her. "Haven't been able to get much out of him."

Finley approached Moore and asked him his birth date. When he didn't respond, she started yelling orders at him.

"Earl, sit up," Finley said. "Sit up!"

She then dragged him several feet before repeatedly ordering him to sit up, the footage shows. When he didn't, she kept yelling.

	<p>“I am not playing with you tonight!” she hollered, before disengaging.</p> <p>For the next several minutes, officers tried to coax him to stand and walk to the front of the house. When that failed, they pulled him up by his arms, supporting him as they led him through the kitchen, living room and out the front door.</p> <p>Cadigan was waiting just off the front porch with a gurney. Officers helped Cadigan place Moore onto it. Noticing he was hanging off slightly, Cadigan lifted him up and dropped his limp body back down onto the gurney. Finley wrapped a blanket around Moore, and then both EMTs strapped him onto the gurney as he lay face down. They wheeled him to the ambulance and, at 2:26, lifted him into the back.</p> <p>Forty-eight minutes later, Moore was pronounced dead at the hospital.</p> <p>‘He didn’t deserve the way he died’: Mother of teen restrained at behavioral health facility speaks out</p> <p>Teresa Haley, president of the NAACP’s Springfield chapter, compared Moore’s death to that of George Floyd, who also died of positional asphyxia when Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knees into Floyd’s back for 9½ minutes. Positional asphyxia occurs when the position of a person’s body prevents them from breathing.</p> <p>“It was almost worse,” because the body-cam footage showed Moore struggling to breathe, she said, according to the Illinois Times.</p> <p>“If this guy was already ... having difficulties breathing, and then you put him on a stretcher facedown, I mean, it was hostile to see the video and how they treated him,” Haley said. “They literally threw his hands behind and just strapped him down. He couldn’t move if he wanted to.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Honduras environmental defenders killed
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/11/honduras-environmental-defenders-shot-dead-guapinol-mine
GIST	<p>Two environmental defenders have been shot dead in broad daylight in Honduras, triggering fresh calls for an independent investigation into the persecution and violence against a rural community battling to stop an illegally sanctioned mine.</p> <p>Aly Domínguez, 38, and Jairo Bonilla, 28, from Guapinol in northern Honduras, were murdered on Saturday afternoon as they returned home on a moped after finishing work collecting payments for a cable company. They were intercepted by armed assailants and died at the scene, according to relatives.</p> <p>Domínguez and Bonilla were co-founders of Guapinol’s grassroots resistance against an iron ore mine owned by one of the country’s most powerful couples. Domínguez was among 32 community leaders falsely accused of crimes by the mining company and local authorities.</p> <p>Local police and prosecutors immediately ascribed the deaths to a botched mugging – even though the assailants fled without taking the victims’ moped, cellphones or money.</p> <p>UN agencies, rights groups and the US embassy condemned the killings. Relatives and lawyers have questioned the official version of events, pointing to the ongoing threats and harassment faced by the community.</p> <p>“We reject the official hypothesis. These two young men were founders of the struggle to protect our natural resources from an illegal mine that is destroying rivers in the national park. For five years we’ve been threatened, criminalised and falsely imprisoned, the only thing left was murder,” said Rey Domínguez, 58, a community leader and Aly’s brother.</p>

“It’s vital that an independent impartial investigation is carried out which must take into account the possibility that Aly and Jairo have been retaliated against for their work defending human rights,” said Michael Phoenix, head of research for the UN special rapporteur for human rights defenders.

The Guapinol case stems from a huge open-pit mine in nearby Tocoa, which was authorised inside a protected national park in a process mired by legal irregularities, [according to international experts](#). Community members, including Domínguez and Bonilla, set up a peaceful protest camp after the mine polluted rivers relied upon by thousands of people.

Security forces violently evicted the encampment and dozens of arrest warrants were issued against the protesters. Rey and Aly Domínguez spent time in jail on bogus charges in 2019. International legal and human rights experts widely condemned the criminalization of the activists and the subsequent militarization of the community, which forced several people to flee and seek asylum in the US.

The mine was among hundreds of environmentally destructive extractive projects greenlit by National party leaders, several of whom now face drugs and arms trafficking charges in the US. After 2009, [Honduras became one of the most dangerous countries in the world to](#) defend natural resources.

The highest-profile victim was the Indigenous defender [Berta Cáceres](#), who was assassinated in March 2016 after suffering years of threats and harassment linked to her opposition to an internationally funded dam.

The post-coup regime ended a year ago, when Xiomara Castro, the wife of Manuel Zelaya, the president ousted in 2009, came to power promising to reinstate the rule of law and protect defenders.

Initially, there were high [hopes after the supreme court freed Guapinol](#) leaders who had been convicted on bogus charges. But the mine continues to operate, and the community have reported ongoing police harassment.

Joaquín Mejía, a prominent Honduran human rights lawyer, said the new government was [partially responsible for the murders](#) as it had failed to suspend or cancel the illegal mining concessions granted by the former regime.

Phoenix said: “Xiomara Castro came into government promising to protect human rights defenders. The imposition of extractive projects on communities without their consent is one of the root causes of attacks against defenders in Central America, but where there is political will, governments can address it. The Honduran government must do more.”

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HEADLINE	01/12 China: driver runs down pedestrians, kills 5
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/12/world/asia/quangzhou-crash-china.html
GIST	<p>A driver sped into pedestrians in a busy intersection in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, killing at least five people and injuring more than a dozen others, according to the police and videos posted online.</p> <p>Officers arrested a 22-year-old man and were trying to determine a motive, according to the city’s public security bureau. Videos appeared to show the driver throwing money into the air after hitting the people and before being apprehended.</p> <p>The incident, which took place on Wednesday during the afternoon rush hour, set off shock and anger online and in Guangzhou, a city of more than 18 million people and the capital of Guangdong Province.</p> <p>Footage of the scene, in the busy Tianhe district, showed a black BMW S.U.V. entering the intersection of Tianhe Road and Tiyu East Road at high speed, making turns as it struck pedestrians and motorists in multiple crossings.</p>

	<p>Afterward, victims lay immobile and bloodied on the roads, stray shoes and phones scattered around them. “There was a collective wail,” Hym Chu, a 25-year-old photographer, wrote in a post on Weibo, a Twitter-like social platform. “Everyone ran.”</p> <p>Mr. Chu said he stayed for two hours at the chaotic scene, retrieving belongings for the injured and helping to move the damaged motorcycle of a delivery worker.</p> <p>In one video of the driver, filmed while he was being held to the ground, he shouted that his uncle was Huang Kunming, the Communist Party secretary of Guangdong Province. It was unclear whether that was true.</p> <p>It is rare for vehicles to be deliberately driven into crowds in China, but reckless driving involving luxury cars has sometimes stoked public anger, touching a nerve in a country with a stark wealth gap.</p> <p>More than a decade ago, in the northeastern city of Baoding, the son of Li Gang, a deputy police chief, killed a college student while drunkenly driving his Volkswagen sedan. As he was apprehended, he yelled, “My father is Li Gang!” Propaganda officials tried to cover up the incident, but the phrase became a grim joke symbolizing the impunity of powerful local officials and those connected to them.</p> <p>Within hours of the Guangzhou incident on Wednesday, it became one of the top trending topics on Weibo, with many users decrying the senseless deaths and disparaging the driver. By Thursday morning, several graphic videos and photos from the scene had been taken down by censors.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Police: arrested teen linked to 50 car thefts
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/police-teen-arrested-for-stealing-cars-in-kent-linked-to-50-more-thefts-in-the-past-year
GIST	<p>KENT, Wash. - A 16-year-old girl and a 26-year-old women were arrested for allegedly burglarizing a car dealership in Kent, stealing five vehicles. Police believe the teen is linked to more than 50 car thefts this past year.</p> <p>The latest theft was reported at 360 Motors, a car dealership in Kent.</p> <p>Tryamel Anderson has been in business for four years at the same location on Central Avenue South. During that time, he said he’s been broken into four times, with the latest being the worst of them all.</p> <p>"They just busted the whole window out and helped [themselves] in," Anderson said.</p> <p>He says his surveillance cameras captured four people breaking into the dealership around 5 a.m. on New Year’s Day.</p> <p>"Everybody's ringing the New Year’s in and I wake up to this," Anderson said. "They were probably in here maybe five minutes. They just grabbed the keys, went outside, picked which car they wanted and drove off."</p> <p>He says four cars, a BMW, Lexus, Cadillac and an Escalade were taken off his 30-car lot in just minutes.</p> <p>"Why this little place? I'm just a little car lot," Anderson asked.</p> <p>Auburn Police say a few days later, someone reported an unlicensed car parked near 9th Street NE.</p> <p>Officers were able to track it down and confirm it was stolen. They then linked the pair to the thefts.</p> <p>"It is alarming, obviously, when you see the age. That is such a young age," said Kolby Crossley, a spokesman with Auburn PD.</p>

He said the teen targeted residential areas around Auburn, taking as many as 50 cars as people left them running to warm it up.

"In most cases, it takes just a few seconds for someone to steal these vehicles," Crossley said.

Both suspects' homes were searched, where police found more than a dozen sets of keys to stolen cars. They were arrested and booked for burglary and car theft.

Police say charges can stack up against the teen as the investigation continues.

The 26-year-old was in court on Wednesday, and prosecutors argued she be held on \$10,000 bail. However, a judge released her despite prosecutor's objections.

Four out of the five cars have been found and returned to the dealership.

One is currently at the body shop getting repaired. Anderson says two others had scrapes and bumps to the bumpers, but was more alarmed about what he found inside them-- mail from residents in Bothell, Buckley and other areas.

"It just looks like they're going around stealing," Anderson said. "I thought I was going to find their name, but I found everyone else's instead."

He also found a child's battery-powered toy car in the backseat of the BMW

"They were acting like it's their car, like they were joyriding, like they had their kid in the backseat," Anderson said.

The thefts are damaging and costly for the small business owner already facing trying times.

"As soon we started taking a couple steps forward, we take three steps back," Anderson said.

The King County Prosecutors Office says the 50 cases have not been sent to prosecutors, but is rather an ongoing police investigation. They say they will act on cases immediately as they're received.

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HEADLINE	01/11 FBI: one of 'largest drug busts Yakima Co.'
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/fbi-finds-120k-fentanyl-pills-in-one-of-the-largest-ever-drug-seizures-in-yakima-county#
GIST	<p>YAKIMA, Wash. -- More than 120,000 fentanyl-laced pills and 42 pounds of meth were seized in one of the "largest drug busts in Yakima County."</p> <p>According to the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington, the FBI's Safe Streets Task Force conducted a federal investigation regarding drug trafficking within the City of Yakima.</p> <p>The investigation resulted in multiple federal search warrants in Yakima County.</p> <p>On Dec. 28, the FBI Task Force seized more than 120,000 fentanyl-laced pills and more than 42 pounds of methamphetamine.</p> <p>In addition to the fentanyl and meth, FBI also seized a loaded Beretta pistol and \$152,000. \$100,000 of that was buried outside the residence.</p>

	In connection to the seizure, Eliseo Equihua-Zamora was indicted on Jan. 10 with Possession with Intent to Distribute Over 50 Grams of Actual (pure) Methamphetamine, Possession with Intent to Distribute over 400 grams of Fentanyl, and Possession of a Firearm in Furtherance of a Drug Trafficking Crime.
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HEADLINE	01/11 Seattle PD: city-wide auto theft operation
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-police-arrest-5-recover-4-stolen-cars-city-wide-auto-theft-operation/QM2CCMYDSJBZXKOPICOLK6J5DA/
GIST	<p>Seattle police arrested five people as part of a city-wide auto theft operation that began last weekend, the department announced Wednesday.</p> <p>According to police, officers were doing surveillance and routine checks of vehicles around 12:30 p.m. last Saturday when they noticed that some stopped cars had no license plates, modified trip permits or returned as stolen after records checks were completed.</p> <p>Officers detained the occupants of those cars and identified them. Police said “a few” of the people had outstanding warrants and booked them into jail.</p> <p>Police recovered four stolen cars, two guns and drugs during the operation.</p> <p>Of the five people arrested, one was arrested for possession of a stolen vehicle; two were arrested for felony warrants, including possession of a stolen vehicle and burglary; and one was arrested for unlawful possession of a firearm. Those four suspects were booked into the King County Jail, police said.</p> <p>A fifth suspect was also arrested for possession of a stolen vehicle but was medically declined at King County Jail. Police transported him to Harborview Medical Center, where he was later released.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 King Co. data: decrease in juvenile crime
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/data-shows-decrease-juvenile-crime-king-county/281-4a31f5a5-bdd1-4613-a639-1f5004e6d6d6
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Despite recent, high-profile cases, data from the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office (KCPAO) shows crimes committed by juveniles have been steadily declining for over two decades.</p> <p>This week, five teens were arrested in King County related to an armed robbery, four were arrested in connection to an armed carjacking and another was arrested in connection to dozens of car thefts.</p> <p>“The data overall is positive, but these high-profile incidents are concerning,” said Casey McNerthney with KCPAO. “We, just like everybody in the public, look and say 'What’s happening here?’ but what we’re doing about it is going before judges and taking that information from police and say this is why there needs to be an intervention.”</p> <p>According to McNerthney, the total number of juvenile crimes referred to the prosecutor’s office between 1998 and 2021 dropped 91%. The number of referrals from police for violent crimes which includes first-degree robbery went down by 68% during that same time period.</p> <p>A KCPAO spokesperson said prosecutors argued the teens in the carjacking and strongarm robbery incidents should be held in detention before trial.</p> <p>On Tuesday morning, police arrested three 15-year-olds and a 13-year-old following an armed carjacking in Renton and a police pursuit that ended in Bellevue.</p>

	<p>One teen from the carjacking incident was in court Wednesday and will be held in juvenile detention until his next court appearance on Jan. 17, while the three others who were arrested were released to an adult and not booked into jail.</p> <p>Last Thursday, five teen boys, three 15-year-olds, a 14-year-old and a 13-year-old were arrested for a strongarm robbery in Ballard. The teens were spotted driving a stolen car southbound down Interstate 5 and were tracked to The Commons at Federal Way. Police followed the teens into the mall and arrested them shortly after they exited.</p> <p>On Wednesday, a 16-year-old was arrested for allegedly burglarizing a car dealership in Kent and stealing five vehicles. The teen is believed to be a prolific car thief, according to police, allegedly responsible for 50 thefts in the past year. The teen is accused of stealing cars while they are warming up in front of people's homes.</p> <p>While juvenile crime numbers may increase from a pandemic low in 2021, a KCPAO spokesperson said they do not think they'll see any significant increase in violent juvenile crimes referred from police departments.</p> <p>The teens arrested in the alleged armed robbery will be back in court on Friday.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Federal blitz: 100 arrests gun, drug crimes
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/georgia-brooklyn-crime-drug-crimes-us-news-f4e972c590c9f7494251e2cecee9baf9
GIST	<p>BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — Federal authorities announced a blitz of arrests and indictments Wednesday against more than 100 people charged with gun and drug crimes in three U.S. states.</p> <p>The flurry of charges from the Justice Department in Georgia, West Virginia and New York comes as federal officials work to combat an uptick in violent crime, particularly involving guns. The Biden administration has tried to showcase federal, state and local efforts to get guns and repeat shooters off the streets.</p> <p>Federal prosecutors and FBI agents were particularly busy in southern Georgia, where an indictment was unsealed charging 76 people with involvement in what authorities called a gang-related network that distributed methamphetamine, fentanyl and other illegal drugs. Authorities called it the largest indictment ever filed in the 43-county Southern District of Georgia.</p> <p>The FBI sent SWAT teams and agents from Atlanta and neighboring South Carolina and Florida Wednesday to help round up more than 30 suspects in coastal Brunswick and surrounding Georgia communities, said Jermaine Deans, the assistant agent in charge of the FBI's Atlanta office. He said one man who fled was arrested with 122 grams (4.3 ounces) of fentanyl.</p> <p>Most of the others charged were already behind bars for prior crimes. Nine charged in the indictment remained at large, authorities said.</p> <p>The dozens indicted in Georgia included a prison guard accused of assisting with drug dealing among inmates and two men charged with selling fentanyl and methamphetamine that resulted in three overdose deaths.</p> <p>“Make no mistake, illegal distribution of illegal drugs is not a victimless crime,” said U.S. Attorney David Estes of the Southern District of Georgia. He said the three who died “bear silent witness to the toll of these illegal drugs flowing into our communities.”</p> <p>In West Virginia, federal prosecutors announced the indictment of 34 people from two Baltimore-based groups related to the sale of fentanyl, heroin and other drugs that led to a spike in overdoses, including at least two deaths. According to court documents, the operation involved the trading of guns for drugs.</p>

The drug activity occurred in rural counties in northeastern West Virginia, U.S. Attorney William Ihlenfeld said.

In New York, four men accused of selling more than 50 guns to an undercover police officer in Brooklyn were charged Wednesday under a new federal gun trafficking law. They were also charged with trafficking fentanyl and crack cocaine.

U.S. Attorney Breon Peace said some of the guns came from Virginia, were made from ghost gun kits or had defaced serial numbers, making them harder to trace. Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell said three of the guns were traced to previous shootings in the city.

Peace said it was one of the first prosecutions brought under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which President Joe Biden signed into law last June.

The law allows prosecutors to charge gun-trafficking conspiracy as a standalone federal crime without having to show that a defendant was in the business of selling guns. The law also provides for greater penalties, with defendants facing up to 50 years in prison as opposed to a maximum of five or 10 years under other statutes.

“The charges brought today exemplify how the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act can be used as an effective tool in our continued battle against gun violence that plagues communities in Brooklyn, across New York City and Long Island and across the nation,” Peace said at a news conference Wednesday.

The guns were purchased by an undercover police pretending to be a drug dealer. NYPD Chief of Detectives James Essig said one of the seized firearms had been used in six separate shootings, including one that wounded eight people during a Family Day celebration in August 2021 in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

In the Georgia case, federal authorities seized 43 guns including some assault rifles. Estes said all 76 defendants were charged with conspiracy to possess and distribute illegal drugs, punishable by 10 years to life in prison. Many were charged with additional crimes.

Guns have been at the center of the debate as the nation grapples with homicides that spiked nationally in 2020 and as recent polls showed that Americans are increasingly concerned about crime.

The increase that started in 2020 has defied easy explanation, though. Experts point to several potential factors: the pandemic that has killed more than 1 million people in the U.S., gun violence, worries about the economy, high inflation rates and intense stress.

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